The Count, The Lady And The Urchin

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The Count, The Lady And The Urchin

by ElizaD

Summary

Count Hannibal Lecter is in a towering temper when he is targeted by the prettiest young pickpocket.

Young Will could be the answer to his problem, until he falls hard for his sisters intended.

Notes

A historical AU because I like picturing Daddy Mads in tight regency clothes. There will be other pairings ending but trust in me my dear readers.

Enjoy.

See the end of the work for more notes

A Chance Meeting

Count Hannibal Lecter stormed through the cobbled streets of London. It would be another month before the season began and London became crowded again. The damned social season was the reason for his thunderous mood. His sister, Misha, turned eighteen in July and was becoming much less tolerant with his constant attempts to delay her coming out.

Her friend Penelope Featherington, one of the few ladies Hannibal did not find unbearably dull, was to be presented the season after next at only sixteen. Misha was easily as intelligent as the younger lady presented herself to be, although Hannibal suspected she was a great deal sharper than her featherbrained Mother realised. Misha was also a stunning beauty, a most accomplished lady in all appropriate areas and much more sweet natured than her brother who had bloodied many a nose in and out of the boxing ring. Whenever she debuted Lady Misha Lecter was sure to be a sensation and therein lay his problem.

Money was discussed in a most unseemly way, it was his fortune that had ambitious mothers flinging their daughters at him season after season. He would dance with those who were having trouble finding a suitor but was borderline rude to those determined to ensnare him by any means necessary. Hannibal had been clear in his intention to never take a wife which left Misha as his only heir and thus made her all the more desirable.

Even without a dowry she would no doubt have a handful of proposals and since Hannibal could not embarrass her by offering less than five figures she would have scores of men of good breeding and fortune vying for her hand. Like most, Misha hoped for a love match but was not so idealistic as to reject anything but true love. If she was introduced in a month's time he had no doubt she would be married by the end of the season. Even if she could be talked into a long engagement it would barely delay the inevitable for more than a few months.

Then whichever unworthy man she chose, for in thirty years he had not met one who deserved her, would whisk her away to some family estate in the country leaving Hannibal to only have the pleasure of her smiles at balls. Despite the dozen years between them the two had become very close since the death of their parents and she would visit, at first. A duchess of viscountess had duties that would keep her away. That was the life Misha wanted and Hannibal could deny her nothing, he only hoped to delay it a little while longer.

His mood was so foul he did not bother to apologise when he bumped against a younger man who mumbled his own apologies and hurried away. It took Hannibal maybe a minute to notice his coin purse was missing. With a growl he turned on his heel and caught the young pocket by his threadbare sleeve. “Give it back and we can both be on our way,” he said through gritted teeth.

The thief turned wide swirling eyes towards him with a look of offended innocence. “I have no idea what you are talking about sir,” he replied curtly. Hannibal squeezed his upper arm hard and rolled his eyes. He yanked the brunette boy closer and reached into his coat, locating his coin purse quickly. The man looked down, his cheeks rosy.

Hannibal took a moment to examine the youth. His clothes were faded and didn't fit him well, donated or stolen but once they were fine. They hung off his slender frame which looked a little too thin. His blue-green eyes were bright and stunningly beautiful and his tousled curls could do with a wash but the colour gleamed against his skin. When Hannibal did not release his tight grip the youth peeked up at him through thick long lashes, perfect pink lips parted. He was delicate and soft but still undeniably male. Hannibal prided himself on not ruining a woman's virtue but he made no secret of his affairs with women already ruined and young widows. He was slightly more discreet with male partners out of respect for their reputation as well as his own. The sweet young creature was more desirable than any feathered, painted debutante. "What is your name?"

"I-I'm sorry, you have your purse, please, l-let me be," the young man stammered as he struggled against Hannibal's tight hold on him. Hannibal could detect real fear in his voice.

"What is your name?" He repeated raising his voice a touch.

"Will Graham," he answered.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Now, why did you attempt to rob me?" Hannibal asked.

"Wasn't personal," Will almost whispered. Hannibal waited patiently for him to continue. Will glanced up at the grey skies above before speaking. "There's a storm coming and I need money for a room," he met Hannibal's eyes with defiance for a moment before looking away again. A fat raindrop fell to the ground between them, and a rumble of thunder threatened more to come. It had been a hot summer and they were due a wrathful storm to clear the air.

"Join me at my club," Hannibal commanded.

"What?" Will asked in surprise.

"The skies will open soon, you'd be better off inside," he suggested more gently, moving his grip to Will's elbow and letting it loosen some.

"Would they even let me in?" He asked nervously.

"Certainly, as my guest."

The rapidly increasing rain made Will's decision for him. "Yes, thank you sir," Hannibal smiled and steered WIll along the streets towards his club. "Wait. Who are you?"

"I am Count Hannibal Lecter."

Orange Blossoms

Chapter Summary

Hannibal shares his plans with Will and brings him home.

Chapter Notes

You wanted more and may have noticed I'm a whore for comments. Please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal's club was nearby and the warmth was more than welcome after the rain outside. For a moment the doorman looked like he might not allow entry but a cold look from Hannibal easily defeated him. He was not the only one, many eyes travelled over his ill-fitting garments as Hannibal led him to a private corner table with two deep leather arm chairs.

Hannibal ordered two bowls of wild boar stew along with a bottle of fruity merlot for the table. Will smiled when Hannibal filled his cup. "This is delicious," he said, licking his lips. They were even more lovely stained red. The stew was warm and thick and, though he tried not to show it, the boy was clearly ravenous, devouring his food eagerly.

"Is this state of homelessness new? He asked, eyes on Will as he enjoyed his own meal.

"No. My dad passed away when I was fourteen, he was a tradesman and didn't have much to leave me. I steal when I need to, not for pleasure," he answered, eyes darting away at the last second.

"What about the days when you cannot secure a coin purse? I imagine it cannot be easy during the season when the streets are full of potential witnesses," he pressed.

"If you are asking if I provide sexual favours for money, the answer is yes," he responded boldly, leaning back in his chair with his legs slightly parted. "But I do require coins rather than food and wine, not that I am not grateful."

Hannibal shook his head. "You are very beautiful and I would love to have you in my bed, but I will not pay for the illusion of attraction or affection," he answered honestly.

"Most are only interested in pleasure," Will shrugged. "I do what I have to to survive, I am not ashamed."

"Nor should you be. I do not judge you. I was fourteen when I lost both my parents to sickness, my sister was only two. We were sent to relatives to keep us safe from the fever but, had we not been so lucky, I would have done anything to ensure our survival," Hannibal told him. "Now she is the only family I have and the most important thing to me."

"I don't have anyone important to care for," Will responded.

"It is sad that you do not consider yourself of importance," Hannibal observed. "Chloe, would you bring us some macarons and tea please?" The smiling woman behind the bar nodded and scurried away. Hannibal returned to observing Will. He was not sure why the young man sparked such an interest in him. He was stunning yes, but Hannibal had laid with several beautiful men and women, none were as captivating as this youth. There was something else in him. Perhaps it was his eyes, even when he did meet Hannibal's gaze it was swift, guarded. "Do you enjoy the company of men?" He asked bluntly.

"I'm not a… not homosexual," Will responded instantly, glancing around the nearly empty room. That response was to be expected. Who would openly admit to a hangable crime?

"That is not what I asked," Hannibal said, raising an eyebrow.

There were several quiet seconds before Will softly replied. "I like women as well," Hannibal nodded his understanding with a small smile. This pretty youth could solve his predicament and he would have the opportunity to satisfy the curiosity he inspired.

"In that case, I have a proposition for you," he said. "My sister, Misha, is eighteen now and has not been introduced to society yet."

Will was nonplussed, he did not know much about society but most girls he saw entering the palace in white silks and feathers were younger than eighteen. "So you'll be presenting her this year, unless she's not ready or something?"

"Misha is more than ready, she will be the perfect debutante, the star of the season," he smiled faintly with pride. "I wish to delay her coming out for another year. I have not met a single member of society deserving of her but by the end of her first season I am confident she will have received offers from a great many wealthy and titled men with great estates outside of London. That is not what I want."

"Don't they need your permission to propose?" Will asked.

"Technically no, although most will not go ahead without my blessing. I could refuse them all but my Misha desires a family and for that she will need to be married," Hannibal explained. "I could be content if I could ensure that she remains close by. That is where you come in."

"What can I do?" Will asked. Coming out, the marriage market, it was not his world, he saw ladies dressed for courting but only from afar.

Hannibal took a case from his inner pocket and opened it to reveal a small painting of Misha. "This is her," he said. Will examined the picture, he could not deny she was a beauty. She was lighter than her brother with wheat coloured curls and eyes the colour of honey. Hannibal's eyes were a darker shade of amber with an almost red tinge to their predatory gaze. Misha shared her brother's high cheekbones and pleasing mouth but there was an innocent kindness in her pretty eyes.

"She is lovely."

"Accomplished too. She would be quite the prize for any Duke or Viscount. Unless she agreed to marry you," he said calmly.

"What?" Will exclaimed. "Even with a dowry I can't support a wife. Believe me Hannibal, I am the last person who should ever marry or have children. You are a count and she is a lady used to the nice things, why would you allow her to marry someone like me?"

"I will take you in for a year as my ward. If Misha should like you then, once she is presented and after a short courtship, you will marry. I will increase her dowry to six figures, secure you a house in town and provide you both with a sizable allowance," he explained.

"What if she doesn’t like me?" Will asked, surely such a sweet young lady would see that there was something wrong with him, after a year Hannibal would see it too.

"Then you will have a warm bed and plentiful food for a year without having to resort to pickpocketing or selling yourself," Hannibal said. "Though Misha has met precious few people she has not liked. She has a gift for bringing out the best in everyone."

"What if I don't like her?"

Hannibal chuckled lightly. "You will."

"I don't know," Will said, squirming.

"It is not so unusual Will. Many Fathers and brothers choose a ladies future husband before she has had a chance to meet him or any other potential matches," Hannibal pointed out. "If I am not certain that the two of you would be satisfied in a marriage I will not allow it," the storm outside grew in intensity and Will flinched when lightning flashed, turning the building outside into black looming silhouettes.

"I can't meet her dressed like this," Will answered. He had been allowed in this fine place but he was acutely aware of every scornful glance.

Hannibal's smile widened, the very image of the cat that caught a particularly fat canary. "Of course not. By the time we return home you will be drenched. There is one more condition, non negotiable," he added seriously. "I have medical training and I will need to personally examine you to make certain you show no signs of disease," his eyes flicked down to Will's crotch, making it clear what kind of examination he meant. Will's cheeks grew warm but he nodded in agreement. "Wonderful."

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The storm did not let up as they hurried toward Hannibal's large town house and when they entered the opulent foyer they were both dripping and Will was trembling. A woman in her late forties spotted them and her lips pursed at the puddles forming beneath them. "We appear to have been caught in the rain, Mrs Hobbs," he explained with a sheepish smile, Will mumbled an apology and she visibly softened. "This is Mr Will Graham, he will be staying with us for the foreseeable future. Please have a hot bath drawn and find him some dry clothing, no doubt we have something suitable in storage," her mouth twitched at the mention of storage as though trying not to laugh. "Place one outfit in my room and the rest in the azure room. Is Francis here?"

"I believe so, Lord Lecter," she answered.

"Send him to the study when you can, please, I need him to deliver a message to Mr Brown," Mrs Hobbs nodded brightly, looking pleased. "Go with Mrs Hobbs, Will," overwhelmed by the ornate surroundings and Hannibal's intimidating presence he meekly followed her, pausing in the doorway when Hannibal spoke. "Orange blossoms, I think," Will did not understand but Mrs Hobbs nodded and led him upstairs.

Once in the bathroom, Mrs Hobbs pulled a rope and before long two younger maids arrived. "Orange blossoms have a lovely scent, Mr Graham, and they have wonderful relaxing properties."

"Okay," he murmured quietly, awkwardly hovering in the corner as the copper tub was filled.

"How is it you know Count Lecter, if it's not too bold of me to ask?" She asked politely.

"It's not but it's uh…. Complicated," he offered.

"Have you met Lady Misha yet?" He offered her a smile, grateful for her attempts to engage him in conversation.

"Not yet," he responded. "Count Lecter intends to introduce us at dinner this evening," his nerves must have shown.

"It will be good for her to have another young person in the house. The last visitor was Lady Gabrielle, Lord Roberto's god-daughter. There were rumours that he hoped she would make a good match for the Count but there was a large age gap. She and Misha became close and she visited often before she got engaged last year, she has married a self-made American, Samuel Weston, a second son too. Count Lecter spoke for the marriage as they were a love match and some of her relatives were very unhappy about it," she told him.

"I grew up in the countryside," Will lied. "I don't know much about society marriages."

"Lady Gabrielle certainly broke a trend but it is not unheard of for fortune or affection to be put before titles," she explained.

"Do you think Lady Misha would want a titled match?" He pressed.

"I couldn't say if it matters to her but if she gets her way she'll have a handful of titled suitors by this time next year. Lady Misha is the perfect lady, she could be a princess," she gushed with true affection. The maid finished filling the streaming tub and Mrs Hobbs scattered sweet smelling herbs and white blooms over the surface, the room filling with a floral scent with a faint hint of citrus. She placed soap and a towel to one side. "Just leave your clothing outside the door and they'll be washed and repaired for you. Count Lecter's valet is very talented and I am sure he will assist Mr Brown with any difficulties, " with a warm smile, she left him alone. Will peeled off his soaked clothes and did as he was bid. He sank below the steaming surface, the delightful smells and herbs making him feel like he was the main ingredient in a soup. He hadn't had anything but a cold wash in years and his muscles were delighted to unwind.

He was left alone for several moments and was on the verge of drifting off when he heard a soft knock at the door. "Will?" It felt somehow obscene to hear that accent when he was naked and loose. "I am coming in," Will sank lower into the water, raising his knees to his chest, trying to hide his genitals. Hannibal entered. carrying a thick rose-coloured robe and an ivory comb dotted with blue and green stones. "I thought you may need assistance detangling your hair."

Chapter End Notes

I learned that Bridgerton season 3 is delayed until next year, sad. But it spurred me on to write this. I'll be listing this as a Hannibal/Bridgerton crossover as characters from the show will appear.

To clarify the timeline this occurring the year before the first season so Daphne and the Featherington girl still have not had their hems dropped but are in the final stretch before going on the market.

As always kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully recieved.

Survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, ear the rude. Until next time, my most gentle readers.

XXX

Examination

Chapter Summary

Hannibal washes Will's hair and examines his body.

Chapter Notes

You asked for more. I think it's about time Will got a glimpse of who he is dealing with.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will raised a hand to his matted hair. It was badly tangled and filthy, he suddenly felt embarrassed of his appearance and meekly nodded. With a pleased nod Hannibal settled on a stool behind him, rolling up his sleeves before working his fingers through Will's greasy locks.

“I think it needs cutting,” Will said, needing to say something, curled up in a tight ball.

“I disagree,” Hannibal responded. “I'm sure once it is clean and rinsed you will look even more lovely,” he said kindly. “Lean forward and tilt your head back,” the maids had left a jug of clean water by the tub and Hannibal poured at least half over Will's hair, protecting his eyes with a hand at his brow. “If you are uncomfortable with the length we can discuss a trim once it is clean and dry. Are you attached to your beard?” He asked, stroking the short hairs at Will's jaw.

“No, I just don't often have a chance to shave,” he answered.

“Good. It would be a shame to hide any of your sweet face and clean-shaven is the current fashion,” he said.

“I think it would be nice to get rid of the hair,” Will said. “Itches in the summer.”

“Tomorrow morning then,” Hannibal's fingers sunk into Will’s curls, removing dirt and undoing stubborn knots with care. He soaped up a bar that smelt of red apples and cinnamon and massaged the suds through Will's curls, blunt nails scraping along Will’s scalp until he relaxed into the touch, eyes closed and almost purring, his body unconsciously unfolding.

Hannibal rinsed his hair and dragged the ivory comb through the wet tresses, twirling the curls around his fingers. The candlelight bounced off the jewels and Will watched the reflected lights dance along the wall. “Those are real,” he murmured softly.

“What was that?” Hannibal asked.

“The stones, they're real jewels not coloured glass,” he repeated.

“Yes,” Hannibal said, lowering the comb so Will could see it more clearly. “Blue and green are the family colours. I have a feeling they will suit you.”

Will gingerly touched the bright stones. “I've never seen a real jewel up close before,” he admitted.

“You shall have some of your own,” Hannibal said, returning to Will's hair.

“No, I didn't mean… I wasn't asking,” he stammered.

“I know,” he said softly. “But a broach would bring out your eyes beautifully,” Will let his eyes fall shut and just enjoyed the touch of his fingers, biting back a needy whine when he drew away. “When you are done please come to my bedroom, two doors down on your right.”

“Bedroom?” Will echoed breathlessly.

“A proper medical examination requires privacy. It is the most comfortable place,” he stated. “Take your time,” he shut the door softly behind him

Will let out a long breath he didn't realise he had been holding, his scalp still tingling a little. Will scrubbed himself clean, his nerves dancing under the skin. Despite his nerves he felt so much better now he was clean and he looked forward to losing his short beard. He dried himself off and wrapped the soft robe around himself but hesitated before leaving the warm steaming room.

A medical examination made sense, though signs of a serious disease would be obvious and Will was not worried about that, he was as careful as he could be. But was that all that would happen when he entered Hannibal's private space? Will had never been with a man for pleasure, only payment and he had never felt the pull he felt towards Hannibal. He had experienced attraction to men before but he had never been even close to a man as handsome and as incredibly tempting as Hannibal Lecter. He believed Hannibal when he said he was not interested in purchasing Will's body, but he wanted him, that was clear. His intention could be to seduce him, Will wasn't sure he hated that idea. Taking a deep breath, he knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

Hannibal's room was dark, dimly lit with a crackling fire and decorated with shades of blue and green with red and black accents, it was intimate and the space tasted of luxury. The kind of luxury that Will had never experienced before. His attention snapped back to Hannibal when he spoke. “You do not need to be nervous, Will,” he informed him gently. “You must have seen a doctor before.”

“Not that I can remember,” Will admitted.

“You need not be uncomfortable, I promise I will remain professional. Now, please take off your robe,” he instructed. Will did so, standing awkwardly by the fire. He could sense Hannibal moving closer though he did not make a sound. Will trembled when he felt Hannibal's finger traced the scar on his shoulder. “You did not see a doctor for this?” He asked

Will swallowed and shook his head. “I had enough for a room at an Inn so I washed it with boiled wine and sewed it up myself. I guessed it would be cheaper.”

“Impressive work,” Hannibal observed. “Very neat,” Will smiled a little at the praise. “You may have a hidden talent for needlework,” he joked. Will stood still as Hannibal examined his body, humming softly as he brushed his hands over his stomach. “No wonder you were so ravenous at the club,” he observed softly.

Hannibal noticed that while his muscles were firm beneath his hands he was worryingly thin, ribs visible under his smooth skin. “You will feel much better with some more meat on your frame, stronger,” he promised, eager to feed the youth. Will had a few bruises that were almost completely faded but other than that and the shoulder scar he was free from blemishes, quite lovely indeed. His thick curls with the wheat colour of he and Misha's hair would look lovely on a small child.

He sank to his knees in front of Will. Taking his wrists in his hands he moved Will's hands to his side, revealing his member. Will's whole body was turning red and he focused on the ceiling, trying to keep himself from shaking. When Hannibal’s fingers moved along his shaft, lifting it to examine his balls, Will felt himself begin to react. Hannibal did not comment though his breathing grew heavier, he continued his examination and Will's body burned when Hannibal spread Will's ass cheeks to check for any damage around the hole. When he stood he nodded with a reassuring smile and washed his hands. Will waited for him to speak.

“The clothes on the bed should suit you,” Hannibal said, gesturing to the fine garments laid out. Will quickly dressed himself, the clothes were not new but had been well cared for and fit him better than what he had worn before. Even Will could tell they were expensive.

Hannibal took a long moment to look at him, particularly enjoying the flush of his cheeks. He was pleased with Mrs Hobbs's choice. A cerulean jacket over an emerald green shirt and powder blue waistcoat, the off-white breeches clung to his firm legs before disappearing into gleaming black riding boots. The Lecter family colours suited him beautifully. The jacket was not as tight fitting on Will's shoulders as it had been when Hannibal wore it but by the time Will was introduced to the critical eyes of the ton he would have his own wardrobe. Hannibal intended to ensure it contained plenty of blue and green, those eyes deserved to be highlighted at every opportunity. “Are you comfortable?” He asked eventually.

“Yes, very comfortable. Thank you,” Will answered, relieved that Hannibal's piercing gaze was no longer pinning him in place.

“Good. I should be able to secure the services of a tailor in the next few days,” he assured Will. He opened his mouth to speak but Hannibal held up a hand. “You may feel it is unnecessary but I disagree. By the time Misha comes out you will have already been established in society and will pass for a perfect gentleman.”

“Tell me about her?” Will requested. “She cannot be as perfect as you say.”

“You are correct, please sit,” he gestured to a low sofa and presented Will with a cup of weak wine before joining him. “Misha is not flawless,” Hannibal admitted, taking a sip from his own cup. “I have no idea how she will handle the financial running of a household as her mathematical skills are terrible. Every plant she has ever cared for has withered and died in a surprisingly short amount of time. By the way do you have a sweet tooth?”

“Yeah, when I get the chance to indulge,” Will answered with a grin.

“Wonderful. Misha has a certain flair for baking sweet desserts but her cooking is dangerous,” he warned. “It is to be avoided at all costs.”

“That makes sense since she grew up with a cook,” Will said.

“Only on special occasions, large dinner parties. I cook the majority of meals myself,” Hannibal informed him.

“You cook? Why?” Will asked. “I don't have many reasons to come to this part of town but don't most of the houses around here have several servants?

“Yes but I enjoy cooking. My household staff consists of two maids, Gertrude and Sarah, one footman, Louie, Mrs Hobbs and her daughter Abigail who acts as Misha's ladies maid. Her husband was my gardener before he passed so now I have a man come twice a week. There is

also my valet, Mr Dolarhyde and I have sent an offer of employment to a Mr Matthew Brown to serve you," he lifted. "So seven, including my gardener. Not the most on the street but considerable."

"I don't need a valet," Will said, squirming.

"Matthew will be most helpful in suggesting the correct clothes and accessories for the correct occasion and he has an excellent reputation but, if you dislike him for any reason he can be replaced. Besides, fine cufflinks can be very difficult to attach without help," Hannibal said, his expression suggesting that was the end of the conversation.

"Do you really think I can pass for a gentleman?" Will asked. "I don't think I can."

"Why ever not?" Hannibal asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Because I'm not," Will said, looking down. "I'm a pickpocket and…" he trailed off.

"A whore?" Hannibal supplied. "What you have done is not who you are. You are a survivor and the only difference between a gentleman and a street urchin are clothes, which I can easily supply, and manners that are not hard to learn. Can you read and write?"

"Yes and I'm good with maths," Will added.

"Good, and do you enjoy reading?" He asked.

"I think I would if I got the time," he said.

"Then I'm sure you will enjoy my library," Hannibal said with a warm smile. "One of the young ladies in the street often borrows books from me, she could recommend something if you wish. I mostly read medical texts and nonfiction."

“The idea of free time is strange,” Will said.

“I cannot imagine your days were packed,” Hannibal speculated.

“No, but I was always planning for where I could spend the night or finding somewhere out of the rain,” Will explained.

“Our lives are very different,” Hannibal admitted. “Or they were.”

“Hannibal, why am I here?” He asked.

“I told you,” Hannibal said. “I would like to arrange a marriage between you and Misha, rather than leave her future up to chance.”

“But you don't even know me,’ he pressed.

“I have studied sociology and psychology and I am confident in my ability to read people. Have you ever harmed a woman, child or animal?” He asked.

“No, of course not, never,” he answered.

“Then I know more than I do about most potential suitors,” he smiled.

“That's pretty much the minimum requirement,” Will answered.

“You would assume so,” Hannibal said. “There are still men who believe a wife must be kept in line by any means necessary.”

“It's just the clothes and all, it seems like you are investing a lot of time and money in me,” Will said.

“I think of it as an investment in my family's future. I never intend to marry thus I will have no heir and everything I own will go to Misha and her husband,” Hannibal explained. “As I said before, if the two of you do not get along I will not push this match.”

“I won't be able to pay back anything if something goes wrong,” Will admitted.

“You are under no obligation to do so. Most marriages are based on friendship if the participants are lucky, I only expect you to try,” Hannibal said. “Will you do that for me?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Thank you Will,” Hannibal said, placing his drink down on the low table. “I wish to make one thing perfectly clear. If all goes to plan and you and Misha become betrothed you will marry her, I will not have her humiliated by a broken engagement. Do you understand?”

“That's fair,” Will said. “I mean we can't even openly court for a year, we'll know eachother better than most.”

Hannibal nodded. “One more thing,” he answered, voice low and dangerous. “If you ever raise a hand to her I will kill you,” Will felt cold fingers twist his insides, he was pretty sure Hannibal was not kidding. “No-one will ever find you, I mean it,” he held Will's gaze for a long minute. “Tell me you understand me, Will.”

“I understand you, Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

I'd love to hear what you think and what you want to see.

I need a favour. Could those of you reading First Kisses let me know which chapter you like best.

My original work is available on kindle under the pennames Lishiva Dee and Eliza Elgy.

As always kudos and comments bring me joy, while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully received.

Survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rude. Until next time, dear gentle readers.

XXX

Affair

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal discuss their attraction to each other.

Chapter Notes

I threw the slow burn out of the window! I regret nothing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They finished their drinks in silence. Hannibal seemed perfectly at ease, ankles crossed in front of him as he gazed at the flickering flames.

Will was gazing at him, trying to figure out the enigma before him. The same man that had combed through his dirty hair without hurting him once had threatened to brutally kill him. Most men would say they would kill for a beloved sibling but Will was certain that Hannibal was completely sincere. But he wasn't scared, the passion behind his words thrilled him.

Will understood people, he always had. He could spot the gentleman too distracted to notice his coin purse going missing and the man too ashamed to visit a Molly house who might follow him into the darkness. Even the most complicated people were easy to figure out, who they were and what they wanted. Sex, money, hate, love; the universal motivators.

But Hannibal was a mystery. It was surprising enough he'd noticed he'd been pickpocketing, his face suggested he was not in the present but he'd followed Will to get his property back. Then there was his reaction, he bought Will a meal and arranged a marriage. No medium could have predicted that. Will still wasn't sure if he believed Hannibal's words. It didn't make sense. Hannibal had been open about wanting him so why yoke him to his sister? He clearly cared a great deal about her reputation and Will did not think he intended them to have a loveless marriage of pure convenience.

Will knew of those marriages, many of the husband's sought out men like him. The wife had certain freedoms and more jewellery than most and they did not question where their husband went late at night. Newlyweds were riddled with guilt while those who had been married came to resent their spouses. On paper they made sense but they were not happy. It was unlikely Hannibal was planning to use his little sister as a diversion so he could slip into Will's bed and while Will reciprocated his desire, the idea of carrying on an affair was distasteful. He had promised not to humiliate or hurt her and if she was everything Hannibal said Will wanted to treat her right.

Perhaps Hannibal found him physically attractive but found the idea of sleeping with a rent boy unappealing, even if he was not paying. Will would have slept with him for free, when Hannibal touched him the surge of want made his knees weak. Hannibal understood that Will needed to do things he was not proud of to survive but perhaps he judged him more than he claimed.

He had a year, one year before he could even court Misha. Would a causal physical relationship with Hannibal be unseemly under the circumstances? The fact that it was not required or even expected made the idea even more appealing. What would it be like to be with a man for no reason other than mutual want? Even nights with women had been few and far between.

Hannibal placed a warm hand over Will's and brought him back to the present. "You still seem concerned," Hannibal observed.

"Do you want to…" Will blushed. Hannibal was facing him now and the words abandoned him. "You said you wanted me in your bed but if a broken engagement would humiliate her what would cheating mean? If you really want me to marry Misha then does that mean we can't ever…?"

"Would you want to?" Hannibal asked.

"You were clear about wanting me," Will said.

"We really must work on your listening skills, William," he said with a soft sigh. "Answer the questions you are asked."

“Will,” he corrected quickly. “I prefer Will.”

“Will. I asked about your wants. Please answer the question,” he requested. “Remember I won't pay for lies, I want honesty between us.”

“Yes, but it would complicate things,” he admitted. “You're speaking about this whole idea of marrying into your family like it's very simple but it's not.”

“I believe it is, but sex does complicate things,” he admitted.

“If you simply want me in your home then say so,” Will said. “You don't need to set up a ruse to keep me close enough to seduce.”

“That is not what I am doing,” Hannibal assured him. “I value honesty and I expect it in return. If all I wanted was to seduce you I would have done so already, there are rooms upstairs at the club for the right price. Would you like me to fuck me or would you rather be fucked?” He asked. Will's mouth went suddenly dry and he took a deep gulp of wine. Hearing Hannibal's fine accent wrapped around such vulgar words made his blood rush south and his head spin, cheeks burning. “You are blushing like an innocent maiden,” Hannibal commented with fond amusement. “It's adorable.”

“Are you speaking in hypotheticals?” He asked cautiously.

“That is up to you,” Hannibal answered.

“Once Misha is out…” he started.

“Then it will stop,” Hannibal said firmly. “I do not understand society's harsh judgement of sodomites and I freely admit that I have frequented Molly houses on occasion. However, I do not believe a man should marry if he does not intend to be loyal. I hope you feel the same.”

Will nodded. “Is that why you don't intend to marry?” Will asked. “Because you couldn't be loyal to a woman or do you just not like them?

“I do like women, and could be loyal if I chose to be but I have chosen the life of a bachelor because I am selfish. I would rather not promise my unending loyalty to anyone, man or woman,” he admitted cheerfully. “I am much happier indulging in casual short-term affairs.”

“So, we would carry on an affair but stop before I start officially courting?” He asked.

“Yes,” Hannibal confirmed.

“And that is acceptable to you?” Will asked.

“If you do not feel it is then we will put the subject to bed,” Hannibal answered smoothly.

“No pun intended?”

Hannibal chuckled. “Pun always intended,” he corrected.

Will rested his head in his hand. “This day has been insane,” he said. “This morning I didn't even have a bed tonight.”

“Are you feeling overwhelmed?” Hannibal asked, placing a sympathetic hand on the back of Will's neck.

“Of course!” Will exclaimed. “You looked like an easy target and now I'm potentially engaged to your sister and discussing the possibility of an affair that could see us both hanged if we were discovered. It's a lot.”

“You look exhausted,” Hannibal observed. “This may not be the best time to have this discussion. Let me show you to your room,” he stood and offered his arm to Will. Will meekly accepted and let Hannibal lead him through the halls of the manor.

He noted the arm was unnecessary when they entered a room only two doors down. The room was nicer than any Inn Will had stayed in. The walls were blue with white lace curtains and a canopy bed with sky blue sheets. “Will it suit?” Hannibal asked.

“It's beautiful,” Will admitted.

“There is a washroom to your left and a dressing room next door,” he said. He released Will's arm and opened a wardrobe. “There are enough clothes here to last you until you have your own garments made.”

Will was wandering around the room in awe. It was more a suite than a bedroom. The bed was tucked in an alcove and there was a seating area with a small table in front of the window, in the summer it would be bathed with sunlight. There was even a white baby grand to one side and a small bookcase, mostly empty. Even with the storm raging outside he could see the view would be lovely, wide open fields lined with flowers and a small stable off to the side. “Do you like horses?” Hannibal asked, following his gaze.

“Yeah. I've slept in stables and sometimes I've got a few coins for mucking them out,” Will answered. “Horses are soothing.”

“I agree,” Hannibal said, placing a hand on the small of Will's back.

“We should finish our conversation,” Will said.

“Is there anything more to be said?” Hannibal asked. “We have established that we are attracted to each other, that any relationship would require secrecy and that it would end when Misha enters society.”

“New clothes and anything else…”

Hannibal cut him off with a scoff. “Are not payment,” he said firmly. “Tell me you understand that, please Will.”

“I do,” he answered.

“Would you turn me down were I to deny you things I can easily afford?” He asked.

“Definitely not,” Will answered confidently.

“Then why are they a factor?” He pressed.

“I don't know?” Will answered awkwardly and Hannibal smiled.

“Rest Will. I would feel better if you took some time to consider any arrangement between us,” he said, turning Will towards the tempting, luxurious bedding. He took a small step closer and brushed one of Will's curls out of his eyes, finger top grazing along the stubble that could not quite be called a beard. “I hope you will not insist on cutting your lovely curls,” he added. “I will check on you before dinner.”

Will fell back on the bed as soon as Hannibal left the room. Even with his mind full of swirling thoughts he noticed the bed felt like heaven. He pressed his hand down on the mattress, feeling it sink the perfect amount, it must be stuffed full of feathers, either that or clouds. Just laying on the soft covers that smelled faintly of lavender and lemons made him feel sleepy.

He stripped off the fine fabrics and carefully hung them in the wardrobe before slipping under the covers. He was intending to sleep in his underclothes but the fabric of the blankets was so much more sumptuous he slipped them off and closed his eyes.

Thunder rumbled in the distance and rain softly fell on the window panes. There was no reason to keep one eye open, no danger of someone trying to take what few coins he may have, Will felt completely safe and sleep began to settle over him.

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There was still some time before dinner so Hannibal decided to take the opportunity to speak to Misha while Will slept.

He had Mrs Hobbs bring a tray of tea to the drawing room and found Misha reading in the library.

“Miela mergina, will you join me for tea in the drawing room?” He asked, smiling as soon as he saw her. Her mere presence brought him such joy.

“Of course Hannibal,” she answered with a smile. She spoke hardly any of their home language but understood minor endermeants from her brother.

When they were settled in the drawing room he began the conversation he had been slightly dreading. “We must discuss your coming out,” he said, grimacing slightly when her face lit up.

“Can I be presented this year?” She asked in excitement.

“No, mano brangusis, not this year,” he said.

“But Hannibal, Cressida Cowper is to come out this year and she is two years younger than I,” she argued. “

“That may be because her Father cannot wait to be rid of her, she is her Mother's daughter after all,” he replied.

“Hannibal, you should be more kind,” she chided him.

“Of course,” he conceded

“Why must I wait?” She asked again. “I have dedicated myself to my studies and been patient but I am ready Hannibal.”

“I know. I have taken a ward,” Hannibal answered. “A relative of a friend who requested our charity, I did not feel I was in a position to refuse,” he said. “The young man is from the country so I cannot guide you both through the season. You understand, miela mergina?”

“Yes Hannibal,” she was disappointed but accepted his reasoning. She trusted her brother to guide her through her first season and the rules of courtship. He was doing a favour for a friend out of charity and she could not be angry with him for that.

“However it is high past time we dropped your hems, would you agree?” He asked. She smiled brightly and nodded. “Good, I must arrange an appointment with my tailor for our ward but hopefully Miss Delecruix will be able to see you before she is drowning in debutantes and wedding dresses.”

“Thank you, Hannibal. Tell me about this ward?” She requested.

“His name is Will Graham. I am very eager for the two of you to meet.”

Chapter End Notes

If there's anything specific you wish to see let me know.

My original work is available on amazon kindle under the pennanes Eliza Elgy and Lishiva Dee.

As always kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully received.

Survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, early the rude. Until next time my most gentle readers.

XXX

Dress To Impress

Chapter Summary

Will meets Matthew Brown his very friendly new valet and finally meets Lady Misha

Chapter Notes

Took a while but her it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was roused from his dreams by a polite knocking on his door. Will was used to nightmares filled with blood and wide dead eyes glaring at him in accusation and the monster lingering in the corner of his eye, its gaze hungry. He would've happily slept all night in the plush bed with dreams of wildflowers, horses and soft words whispered in his ear. Will felt better rested than he had in months and the bed was wonderfully comfortable. He slid from the warm cocoon and donned a satin robe before opening the door. Hannibal's eyes travelled over the bare skin of his collarbone before meeting his eyes with a smile. “Good evening Will, did you rest well?”

“Yes, thank you,” Will replied, slightly breathless and acutely aware of how little he was wearing under the thin robe. Hannibal's eyes travelled over the thin fabric before meeting his eyes. “May we come in?” He asked. Will noticed a shorter man stood behind him, watching Will with a kind smile.

“Of course,” Will said, stepping back to allow them to enter. He turned to the wall to secure his robe more tightly.

“This is Matthew Brown, your valet if you agree. Mr Brown, this is Will Graham,” Hannibal introduced them.

“It's nice to meet you,” Will said awkwardly.

“It's a pleasure sir,” Matthew replied, his smile growing wider. He looked more natural with a wider smile, less intimidating than Hannibal if not as handsome. Though Will didn't really know how to talk to the man.

“Dinner will be in an hour, assuming you are feeling up to it,” Hannibal told him.

“Yes, I'm looking forward to it,” Will lied. He was refreshed from his nap but having digested the events of the day so far found himself feeling nervous of meeting Hannibal's sister, well aware of how highly Hannibal thought of her. Luckily his stomach chose that moment to growl.

Hannibal tilted his head, mouth tilted in amusement. “Then I will leave you to get ready, see you soon,” he said politely, his eyes momentarily flicking to Matthew, who was still looking over Will with interest, before he left them alone.

“You seem uneasy my lord,” Matthew observed after a moment of uncomfortable silence.

“I'm not a lord,” Will muttered.

“I'm sorry Mr Graham,” he replied.

“Can you just call me Will?” He asked.

“If you would like, Will,” he said kindly.

“Thank you Matthew,” Will said. “I really don't know what I'm supposed to be doing,” he admitted. “I'm new to this kind of life, and I've never had a valet.”

“You'll get used to it soon, as long as you look the part. Society cares about how things look above everything else. Would you like me to help you select an outfit?” He suggested.

“Yes please,” he answered with a relieved sigh. He perched uneasily on one of the chairs as Matthew looked through the wardrobe. “You seem to understand this world. What did you do before this?”

Will asked.

“Servants see everything, I kept quiet and watched. I was a footman at another house but I was expected to valet for guests and the masters recommended me to Count Lecter when he had a guest, a Mr Weston I believe,” he answered.

“Did you not wish to stay there?” Will asked.

“Not since all the children of the home married and moved away,” he answered. “I was one of two footmen, with only two people remaining in the house I was pretty redundant. I'm happy with the promotion,” he said with a smile, setting some garments on the bed, looking between two dinner jackets.

“Oh, that's good then,” he answered.

“Are you uncomfortable, Will?” He asked.

“I'm nervous,” he admitted. “Hannibal has been kind to me but I know how highly he thinks of Lady Misha. I worry she won't like me.”

“I spoke to her once or twice, she is sweet,” he said with a shrug, clearly not as enamoured with her as everyone else he'd spoken to. “At least you can look great,” Matthew said with a smile. He returned a dark red jacket to the wardrobe and carried the rest of the clothes to the dressing room. “Shall we?” Will followed him into the smaller room as he hung up the chosen garments. The jacket he had settled on was a deep royal blue with black trim, his waistcoat and trousers were black velvet and the shirt beneath was a dark plum shade. The brightest part of the ensemble was a silk cravat of rose pink, similar to the shade of Will's

cheek when Matthew slid the robe off his body. Matthew kept up a professional air but it was still strange to be nearly naked in front of a stranger.

He gestured for Will to sit at a vanity and knelt at his feet to slide a plum coloured stocking on each left, securing them above his knees with a slim ebony ribbon on each. He dragged his hands down the fabric, smoothing it down before rising to his feet and offering a hand to Will, helping him to stand. Will felt ridiculous clambering into the trousers that Matthew held for him and blushed furiously when Mathew loosely tied up the laces on either side of his hips. The trousers were tight and came to just below his knees, the fabric hugged his thighs, fitting him surprisingly well.

The whole thing was uncomfortable for Will but Matthew kept smiling at him serenely, the expression soothing, and Will reluctantly let him guide his movements. He raised his arms obediently to allow Matthew to slide the dark satin shirt over his head but stepped away to tuck it in himself. Matthew followed him and took over once it was mostly down, making sure it was neat before tightening the leather ties of his trousers and kneeling to slide on a pair of low heeled black shoes.

He held up the waistcoat for Will to thread his arms through, smoothing the fabric over his shoulders, breath warm on Will's throat. Will noticed the way his body moved when he walked around to Will's front, carefully doing up the small sparkling buttons. His movements were less smooth and elegant than Hannibal's but there was still something predatory about him. It seemed restrained, like a bird of prey in a too small cage. Not frightening but oddly fascinating. He arranged the waistcoat in the correct placement and ran his fingers over the subtle patterns there.

The pink scarf was the softest thing Will had ever worn. He smiled when the fabric was wrapped around his neck and Mathew caught his eye with a brief wink. His gaze stayed on Will's face as he folded the fabric over itself and pulled it a little too tight, loosening it a little when Will gasped. Matthew smoothed down the fine silk and tucked the ends into his shirt, fingers rough against his skin.

The jacket went on last, heavy and expensive. His dark curls were trapped under the collar and Matthew carefully freed them. “Dark colours suit you, Will,” Matthew told him. “What cufflinks would you like?” He asked, pointing out a glass box holding a selection of small cufflinks and other ornaments. “May I make a suggestion?” Will nodded. “The silver circles with the black onyx would go well with the embellishments on your jacket.”

“That sounds good,” Will agreed. He placed his hands on Mathew's forearm as he carefully attached the delicate ornaments. Matthew added a silver brooch adorned with gleaming black stones to keep the cravat in place.

“We have a little time before dinner,” Matthew said gently, voice at odds with the familiar heat in his eyes, a burning desire Will recognised. His hands came up to run over the dark coarse stubble on his cheeks.

“I was thinking of shaving,” Will said awkwardly. Matthew nodded and led Will by the arm into the small space of the washroom. After placing a towel around Will’s neck Matthew lathered up his cheeks with some sort of herbal scented foam and dragged a gleaming straight razor across his skin. Will held his breath as the sharp metal was dragged over his chin and across his Adam's apple.

Once he was done, Matthew cleaned away the lingering soap and ran his fingers over the smooth skin with a smile. “A good idea,” he assured him. There was a selection of oils in front of the mirror. “Should I style your hair?” He asked, choosing a small bottle.

“Yes please,” Will responded, looking at his face in the mirror. Without the facial hair he looked younger and even… well pretty was the only word that came to mind. The soothing smell of lavender filled the intimate space as Matthew worked the scented oil through his hair, arranging the curls to fall neatly rather than in their usual fluffy mess. He tucked a couple of curls behind his ear and turned Will to face him, fussing with his accessories more than needed before stepping back. “Will I do?” Will asked with a forced laugh, unnerved by his scrutiny.

“You will more than do” Matthew assured him, stepping closer and fiddling with the brooch at his neck before meeting his eyes. “You look good enough to eat.”

“I quite agree,” Matthew took a large step back at Hannibal’s voice. Will had a similar reaction at the chill in his tone, Hannibal threw a cold look at Matthew before smiling warmly at Will, holding out a hand to beckon him forward. Hannibal ran his knuckles over Will's bare cheeks and Will had the urge to rub his cheeks against Hannibal’s hand like a cat. “You do look lovely, clean shaven.”

“Not like an eight year old?” Will joked.

“No, you look like exactly what you are, an attractive young gentleman,” he moved closer, inhaling the air around Will with a frown before striding into the bathroom. He tossed the jar of shaving cream to Matthew who caught it easily in one hand. “This smells atrocious, I'll have Francis replace it with something finer.”

“Shall I dispose of it, sir?” Matthew asked, voice flat and subdued.

“Or keep it for yourself, I don't wish to smell it again,” he said dismissively, more interested in the glass bottles of cologne on Will's vanity. He approached Will and tilted his chin up with one hand, dabbing lemon scented fluid on the part of his neck not covered by rosy silk. “Perfection,” he said softly, settling the fabric of the jacket over his shoulder. “I am pleased these fit so well.”

“Where did they come from?” Will asked, the garnets were not a flawless fit but they were close.

“They were mine,” Hannibal responded. “Though I do think you suit the family colours better than I,” Hannibal himself was dressed in a deep red jacket with a pale green shirt, the jacket bringing out the maroon shades of his eyes. Will's stomach warmed at the knowledge that he was wearing Hannibal clothes. “Shall we?” He offered Will his arm and tucked Will's hand through his elbow, leaving his larger palm on top. “Mr Brown, Mrs Hobbs has prepared a plate for you in the servants hall. You are relieved for the night so you can unpack and settle in.”

“I should be here to help Will undress,” he answered quickly.

“*Mr Graham* was able to undress himself this afternoon without your assistance. I assure you he is quite capable,” Hannibal responded, his voice silky smooth. Will gave Matthew a kind smile over his shoulder as Hannibal guided him from the room. “How do you find Mr Brown?” He asked.

“He was very helpful,” Will said. “I don't even know where to start with cufflinks and jewellery.”

“That is his job,” Hannibal told him. “If he displeases you please let me know, Mr Weston was very pleased with his taste. I believe he had planned to invite Matthew overseas with him, I'm not sure why he changed his mind.”

Will turned his wrists and watched the onyx reflect light. “I like these,” he said.

“You are in danger of developing a taste for expensive things,” Hannibal teased. “I will be sure to encourage that. Are you ready to meet your potential wife?”

“Does she know who I am?” Will asked nervously.

“I told her you were a relative of a friend who grew up in the country,” Hannibal said. “If I told her I expect her to marry you she would no doubt want the opposite,” he said with a fond smile. “She is not contrary by nature but is at that age where she will not be told what to do.”

He led Will into the elegant dining room where the table was set for three. The silverware gleaned in the candlelight and Will could already smell something fragrant, ready to be served. He was distracted when he saw the young lady standing by the table waiting for them. Lady Misha Lecter.

Will tightened his grip on Hannibal's arm to keep himself steady, his tongue feeling swollen and heavy in his mouth. It was true the picture did not do her justice, she was angelic. She shared certain features with Hannibal, high cheekbones and long lashes, but while darkness hung around him she shone with light, her colouring paler. Her skin was creamy and free of blemishes, her sweet face framed with golden curls and her large eyes were a light honey gold. She was not as tall as Will, a few inches shorter and her body was slight. The minty green dress with blue embroidery looked stunning on her despite its simplicity. She was truly perfect and when she smiled the room seemed brighter.

“Misha, this is Will Graham. Will, my sister, Lady Misha.

She curtsied elegantly with a sweet smile. “It's lovely to meet you Mr Graham,” her voice was musical, accent fainter than her brothers.

“A pleasure Lady Misha,” Will managed softly, feeling his cheeks warm.

Hannibal smiled. Will was already beguiled by her radiant beauty.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this and that you will not turn on dear Misha

My original work is still available on amazon kindle. Search for Eliza Elgy and Lishiva Dee.

As always kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully relieved.

Survive, life and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rule. Until next time gentle readers.

XXX

Peaches And Cream

Chapter Summary

Will enjoys a delicious dinner and things become more heated during a night cap.

Chapter Notes

This one took a little longer, My mental health has been tested this week. Please let me know your feelings on Mischa.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dinner was the most wonderful thing Will had ever eaten. The white soup was delightfully creamy and sweet served with bread softer than Will had ever experienced. He was careful not to appear as though he was a starving man but he devoured every drop eagerly.

“Is the soup to your liking, Will?” Hannibal asked with a slightly amused smile.

Will quickly swallowed the mouthful. “It is delicious,” he answered. “My compliments to the chef.”

He blushed a second later when he remembered that Hannibal had almost certainly prepared the meal. “Thank you Will,” he responded with a polite smile.

“I feel I should warn you Mr Graham, my brother needs no more compliments,” Mischa said, throwing a teasing glance at Hannibal. She leaned towards Will. “We may have to have the doorways widened,” she told him with a light giggle.

Will chuckled in answer, feeling his smile widen. He had been taken with Mischa's exquisite beauty and now found that he felt a lightness in his chest whenever she spoke to him. Her

good natured teasing of her brother was adorable and she was intelligent. “Please call me Will, my lady,” he requested.

“If you shall call me Mischa,” she responded. Will nodded in agreement as their clean bowls were removed by a young man in whose sandy curls were desperately fighting against hair oil. Moments later they were presented with a main course, roasted pheasant with late summer vegetables. “Have you met any of our neighbours yet?” She asked Will.

“No, I arrived in town very recently and I'm afraid you and your brother are my only acquaintances,” he answered.

“We will remedy that very soon,” she responded with a kind smile.

“Yes, Mischa will be turning eighteen in two weeks,” Hannibal told him. “There will be a fair number of people for you to meet.”

“The five eldest Bridgerton children are coming along with their Mother, Lady Violet. She is a most charming lady,” Mischa informed him.

“The five eldest? How many children does she have?” Will asked.

“Give her a moment, counting is a challenge for Mischa,” Hannibal said with a deceptively polite smile.

“Don't be so rude, Hannibal. There are seven,” she answered.

“Are you certain?” Hannibal asked.

“Yes.”

“Try again,” he suggested with barely contained laughter.

“Oh my goodness, Franchesca!” She said with a gasp. “Eight, four boys and four girls, Franchesca is travelling with an aunt of some kind. She completely slipped my mind.”

“Or you tried to count without using your fingers,” Hannibal snorted.

“I warn you Hannibal I will throw a potato at you,” she said, holding back a smile.

“You will not,” Hannibal answered.

“Will, throw your potato at him,” she ordered with a cheeky smile.

“No. Throw your own potatoes,” Will said, enjoying her bright laughter.

“Please do not encourage her,” Hannibal requested, his words barely audible over Mischa's giggles and Will's laughter. His face softened as he watched Will laughing openly and honestly. It was truly a beautiful sight and he wanted to cause that laughter himself. He tried again when his dining companions managed to compose themselves. “If a single food item is used as a projectile I shall separate the two of you during meals.”

Will quickly ate his potatoes as he was feeling tempted to see how Hannibal would react were he to launch it across the table. “Will you tell me about your guests, Mischa?” He asked politely.

She smiled brightly and obliged. “The Bridgerton children were named alphabetically. Anthony is the eldest, he is very handsome and has wonderful manners,” Hannibal's lips twitched but he did not correct her. “His brother Benedict is almost as good a swordsman and a most talented artist, if you can convince him to show you his work. It is often quite the challenge,” she said with a light giggle.

“If you are not up to it, Mischa and his sister have stolen his sketchbook… three times, I believe?” Hannibal interjected.

“Four,” Mischa corrected proudly.

“I will trust your count just this once,” Hannibal remarked. “At least until you finish any dangerous foods,” he hid his smirk in the rim of his glass.

“The other three guests?” Will prompted, dropping his eyes to avoid Hannibal's dancing eyes, knowing he would end up laughing.

“Colin is young, charming and very handsome,” Mischa said with slightly pink cheeks. “He is planning to travel the Mediterranean within the next couple of years, to expand his mind. Do you have an interest in travel?”

“I've never had the opportunity,” Will answered honestly. “London is the farthest I have ever been from home,” not exactly a lie. Will and his Father had resided just outside of London and Will had made his way there with the few savings that had been left to him.

“Do you enjoy a warm climate, Will?” Will forgot the question when he found himself suddenly most distracted by the way Hannibal's lips closed around the silver fork and there was a flash of his teeth tearing into the soft meat of the bird. “Will?”

“Yes “ he managed after a moment. “Yes I am fond of the err… heat.”

“As am I,” Hannibal answered, somehow making the short sentence sound sinful.

“You will change your mind when you see London covered in snow, it's the most beautiful place in the world,” she gushed.

“Second,” Hannibal said quietly. “Italy would be the most lovely honeymoon destination.”

“I quite agree,” Mischa agreed.

“The Bridgerton’s fourth son?” Will prompted, suddenly concerned about saying the wrong thing.

“Will not be attending,” Mischa supplied. “Gregory is very young. The second youngest after little Hyacinth. Daphne is the fourth child. She is absolutely lovely, accomplished, sweet, intelligent and a true beauty. I'm sure you will enjoy her company.”

“I trust your judgement,” Will said. In truth he had been keeping an eye on Hannibal's placid face, watching for a lip twitch or the tiny raise of an eyebrow to indicate disagreement. Mischa had not said a bad word about anyone. He was not sure if it was good breeding, a childlike optimism or had Mischa been lucky enough to only meet good people? The majority of people Will had encountered had few good qualities to speak off except that they paid promptly.

“Her younger sister Eloise is quite the opposite,” she informed with a laugh.

“Not accomplished, intelligent and beautiful?” Will asked.

“Eloise is very pretty, all the Bridgertons are, she is extremely well-read and very sharp witted. Unlike Daphne she is also sharp tongued and rebellious with a rather poor opinion of the opposite gender,” she explained.

“A feminist,” Hannibal chimed in. “She subscribes to the rather radical idea that women have their own brains and voices that they must use and are capable of much more than finding a husband and producing children.”

“Not such a radical view,” Will responded.

“Not when the views of even the most stupid men are given weight,” Hannibal agreed. “Penelope Featherington will also be attending. She does not express her views as loudly as Miss Eloise but I believe she is very intelligent. I mentioned her to you earlier, a great reader.”

“You are attracting her Mother's attention, Hannibal,” Mischa warned him.

“Portia? Odious woman,” Hannibal scoffed. “How on Earth have I done that?”

“She cannot imagine why Pen would borrow so many books if it was not in hopes of marriage,” Mischa informed him.

“Did you overhear this by chance?” Hannibal asked.

“No. She said so whilst I was visiting Pen. Prudence and Phillipa were there too,” she said. “Prudence and Phillipa are her older sisters,” she told Will.

“I shall have to speak to her soon,” Hannibal said tightly, it was clear he did not relish the prospect.

“No please, Hannibal, everytime you speak to her she spends the whole week in a tizzy for fear she has offended you,” Mischa asked.

“Then she should seek not to offend me,” Hannibal retorted. “Penelope is not out in society yet and neither are you. Lady Featherington should keep her idiotic, heinous thoughts to herself.”

“I'm not sure I understand,” Will ventured timidly.

“If her suspicions were shared with the wrong people Pen's reputation would be in tatters and Hannibal's damaged,” Mischa explained. “But once she is presented you will dance with

her?”

“Of course, her company is much more pleasing than that of her brainless sisters,” Hannibal answered smoothly. “No more than twice in one night.”

Mischa giggled. “Hannibal is very proud he has never honoured a lady with two dances in one night,” she said with a fond scoff. Will ducked his head as the plates were cleared, not wanting to ask for another explanation so soon.

“Two dances would be a declaration of my intent to court the lady in question,” Hannibal explained without him needing to ask. “As I have no intention of doing so it will be one dance, regardless of how much I enjoy the lady's mind.”

“I look forward to the day you meet the lady who is able to capture your heart,” Mischa said.

“I do not believe such a lady exists,” Hannibal said, eyeing Will as he took a sip of wine. “But I would like to meet such a person too.”

“Pity, I should have liked to have a sister,’ Mischa said.

“To spend your inheritance on silks and feathers?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I would give up a King's ransom to see you happy,” she said.

Hannibal smiled warmly as he put his hand over hers. “I am happy, dear sister,” the young footman arrived, balancing desserts on his arms. “Especially as we are having my favourite dessert. Fresh peaches drenched in brandy spiked cream,” he turned to face Will. “I'm certain you will enjoy it.”

Hannibal's dark gaze focused on Will's mouth as he brought a spoonful of juicy fruit covered in cream to his lips. Will's eyes fell closed at the taste. The sweet juices spilled over his

tongue, the spike of alcohol chasing after it and warming his insides. He heard a soft moan escape his tingling lips as he opened his eyes to find Hannibal still watching him intently. Will felt his stomach muscles tighten and he licked his lips before swallowing heavily. “Delicious,” he said, embarrassed by his breathless tone.

“You have a spot of cream,” Hannibal said quietly. He leaned into Will’s personal space and dragged his thumb over the skin below Will’s lip, collecting a dot of cream before sucking the pad of his thumb with a pleased hum. Hannibal's smirk grew when Will felt his skin flush, he was sure his cheeks were scarlet. “Mischa, how was today's dance class?”

Will quietly ate his dessert as he listened to Hannibal and Mischa discuss her various pursuits. He tried to pay attention but found his attention was frequently drawn to Hannibal's long fingers and rosy lips. Hannibal caught his eye once or twice and Will was certain he was taking his time with each bite, sealing his lips around the spoon before drawing it out slowly, eyes dancing with mirth.

“Do you enjoy music?” Mischa asked as their clean bowls were whisked away.

“Very much,” Will answered. “But mostly sea-shanties over classical,” he admitted.

“Then you must hear Mischa sing,” Hannibal said.

“But you must accompany me,” Mischa told him, Hannibal calmly nodded in agreement. “Hannibal is very talented on the piano.”

“Long fingers,” Hannibal said, before draining his glass. “Excellent dexterity,” he gave Will a swift wink as he stood up. His face betrayed nothing as he took Mischa's arm and they moved into the drawing room.

Will had been impressed by the piano in his room but the large drawing room held a huge black grand piano, polished to perfection. Hannibal poured him a brandy and gestured for him to take a seat before he settled himself at the piano with Mischa standing beside him. From where he sat, Will had a perfect view of Hannibal's talented fingers dancing over the keys.

Mischa's voice was even sweeter when she sang and Hannibal's face was soft as he watched her sing. Will had not heard the song before, a ballad about a mystical sea creature held captive and her escape back to her home under the waves. At parts it was melancholy but still beautiful. Will had always loved water, he had childhood memories of submerging his ankles in cool lake water, the mud soft under his feet, between his toes. He had never seen the sea for himself but he had seen paintings and it looked wonderful.

He applauded both when it finished, charmed by Mischa's pleased flush. “Thank you,” she said politely. “I must retire now, I am rather tired. Goodnight Will. Goodnight Hannibal.”

“Sleep well, sweet sister,” Hannibal rose from his seat to kiss her forehead. He returned to the piano bench, idly playing random notes until Mischa's footsteps had faded away.

Silence stretched between them, the air thick and vibrating with tension. Will opened his mouth several times before snapping it shut unsure of what to say, twirling the empty crystal glass between his hands.

“Another drink?” Hannibal suggested.

“Yes please,” Will responded quickly. He could feel a slight buzz already but drinking would give him something to do. Hannibal's fingers brushed his as he took the glass, the touch lingered half a second too long and Will was suddenly very aware of his entire body and how sensitive it felt. Hannibal poured him a generous helping and sat next to him with his own drink, a few inches between them. “Trying to get me drunk?” He joked before taking a deep drink.

“Do I need to?” Hannibal asked with a twinkle of amusement. Will ducked his head but gave a discreet shake.

The silence continued.

“It's a beautiful instrument,” Will said, gesturing to the piano.

“Yes, she is quite old now but has been kept in near perfect condition,” he seemed to find something very funny about that.

“Near perfect?”

“I'll show you,” he tugged Will over to the piano and guided him to crouch. “There is a slight imperfection, if you know where to look,” he took Will’s fingers and guided them under the heavy instrument to feel deep grooves carved into it. “H L and M L,” Hannibal told him. “My uncle was not amused when he caught us.”

“Whose idea was it?” Will asked.

“Mine,” Hannibal said proudly. “Mischa was only four at the time and I was a terrible influence.”

“Did she learn potato throwing from you?” Will teased.

“She has not thrown potatoes or any other kind of food since she was eleven and yes,” he answered, rising to his feet and hiding his smirk behind a drink when Will laughed. “Do you play at all?

“Not really,” Will answered.

“Not really?” Hannibal pressed.

“We lived above a tavern for a while, well tavern slash brothel and I picked up some tunes from the piano player but I never had any training or learned to read music,” he explained.

“If you would oblige me,” Hannibal gestured to the seat. Will hesitated, it has been a while and only knew the most simple pieces. “Please?”

Will nervously sat at the bench and stretched his fingers, trying to remember a song. The only one he could remember was a bawdy tune about an unfortunate Miller's large-breasted and promiscuous wife. His first few notes were shaky but it seemed his fingers remembered the music well enough and he reached the end.

“Brava,” Hannibal said when he was done. “You should develop this talent,” he suggested.

“The piano player made enough,” Will said nodded.

“Enough for what?” Hannibal asked.

“Enough for spirits and the occasional night with one of the prettier girls,” Will said.

“Not the best environment for a child,” Hannibal observed.

“It wasn't so bad. I was too young to know what was going on and the girls were always nice to me,” he argued. He smiled and gestured to his eyes. “They called me baby blue.”

Hannibal took his chin in hand, examining his eyes closely. “I imagine they could not get enough,” he said. “Though in this light they appear more green. Most attractive.”

His long fingers released Will's chin but he did not pull them away; instead he traced the line of his smooth jaw, still gazing into Will's eyes.

Will suddenly felt very much like prey, sat as he was he was forced to look up at Hannibal who was bending over him, moving closer. Will's breathing started to come faster and whole body was warmed by lust. It had been so long since he had genuinely wanted someone, been

aroused by an innocent touch. He ached for more, leaning forward with his lips parted as Hannibal moved in closer.

His eyelids fluttered when Hannibal's nose brushed his. He was so close Will could feel his warm exhales against his lips but Will was still trapped in his gaze, unable to look away or close his eyes. Hannibal stayed there, lips an inch away from his, fingers caressing his cheek and eyes burning. Will licked his dry lips and almost whimpered with want when his tongue brushed Hannibal's lips. So close. He didn't know what Hannibal was waiting for but he felt he would combust from desire if he went one more minute without Hannibal's lips on his. “Please,” he whispered breathlessly, the word caught between a prayer and a plea. “Please Hannibal.”

Hannibal's dark chuckle rumbled between them and Will could feel the vibrations under his skin. When his last thread of sanity was ready to snap his eyes fell shut and he closed the distance himself.

Chapter End Notes

Do you hate me? Tell me your thoughts and what you want to see going forward.

As always kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and request are always gratefully received.

Survive, live and thrive and, wherever possible eat the rude.

XXX

Tattle Tale

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will raise the next step and a mystery lady dishes the dirt.

Chapter Notes

I was turned into a newt, but I got better. Then the Internet became temperamental but here I am again. Hopefully I can earn your forgiveness, with smut.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kissing had never been Will's favourite part of the experience, at least not with men. He had kissed a few girls when he was young, or drunk but with men it had always been for cash. It was also just a gesture before they got what they were really paying for.

But it had never felt so good. When Will's lips had brushed against his, Hannibal had immediately responded, wrapping his strong arms around Will and deepening the kiss. It was not hurried or dirty but soft, sensual, with intense want simmering underneath. Hannibal comfortably took control of the situation, dragging Will to the edge of the seat, large hands massaging his thighs.

It felt as though Hannibal would be satisfied to continue kissing him forever and Will really wouldn't mind.

Hannibal's lips were soft and domineering, his tongue carrying the taste of fine whisky and Will's muscles melted. Hannibal's long fingers moved to cradle Will's face sweetly, making him smile into the kiss.

Will moaned into Hannibal's mouth, the sound as soft as a dove's wing and lost in the movements. When his hands curled into Hannibal's hair, Hannibal hooked a hand under one knee, guiding the leg to wrap around his waist. As the wonderful kiss continued, Will felt himself be tilted backwards until his hand landed on the keys causing an awful racket.

“My lord?” Hannibal drew back barely an inch when Francis appeared in the doorway. He reached an arm around Will to lower the key cover but did not move further away. Will was sure his flushed cheeks and heavy breathing made it obvious what they had been doing but when he snuck a peek at Francis his face was perfectly placid. “Is everything well?”

“Yes, thank you Francis, I apologise for the racket,” Hannibal replied smoothly. “You are up late.”

“Just checking the doors and windows are secure my lord,” the likelihood was he was up this late every night but his tone gave nothing away.

“Of course,” with a smile Hannibal smoothly rose to his feet, tugging Will with him. “Goodnight Francis.”

“Goodnight my lord,” Hannibal laced his fingers with Will's and pulled him from the room, passing closely by Francis.

“Has he seen you with men before? He was not surprised,” Will asked quietly as they headed towards Hannibal's room. As mad as it seemed Will could feel a sick curl in his gut at the thought of Hannibal kissing another man the way he had him.

“I mostly meet other men in Mollys or inns so no, he has seen the occasional female guest but no men. I worry about shocking the young ladies resisting here,” Hannibal answered. “If Francis is surprised he hides it well, as well as his opinions. He was the one who caught us marking the piano, he let us finish before alerting my uncle,” he squeezed Will's hand in reassurance. “You do not need to worry, Francis is the most loyal man I have met, he will not betray this family.”

They stopped in front of Hannibal's bedroom door, Hannibal stepped closer, holding both Will's hand in him.

“I will, however, fire him if his interruption killed the mood,” he quipped with a smile.

Will blushed and shook his head. “Not completely,” he answered.

“Good,” Hannibal raised his chin with gentle fingers and kissed him again. Will could feel Hannibal's strength behind every touch but his kiss was still coaxing, reassuring. Any embarrassment at being caught was chased away as his envy pushed him to tug Hannibal closer by his lapels.

Hannibal swiftly opened his bedroom door and drew Will in. The fire was still glowing and oil lamps were set on the bedside tables, the curtains left open. The storm had passed and the bed was bathed in the glow of a full swollen moon. Hannibal released Will and increased the glow of the lamps before shedding his jacket. He moved to the foot of the bed where the light was brightest and held out a hand to Will in invitation. “Come here, love.”

The moonlight glinting off Hannibal's sharp cheekbones made him look ethereal and almost dangerous. Will's stomach buzzed in excitement and he moved without considering it, drawn to Hannibal by a magnetic pull. Hannibal turned so Will was the one bathed in silver glow, leaving him back-lit by the flickering flames. “You look beautiful, dressed as a gentleman,” he commented softly, his hands caressing the dark stone at his throat.

“I like wearing your clothes,” Will admitted, his voice slightly breathless.

“They suit you,” Hannibal answered. “Although they do hide your shape, which is a crime,” with those words he pushed the ornate jacket from Will's shoulder. The waistcoat followed swiftly afterward. Hannibal's hands travelled over his torso, even through the thin fabric of the shirt the touch was burning. Hannibal pressed a gentle kiss to the sliver of throat that was exposed, making Will's breath catch. He could feel Hannibal's smirk against his throat as he gently licked over the skin there. His long fingers unclipped the jewel and he carefully placed it on a nearby table. The heavy silken tie slipped from Will's skin with agonising slowless, the gentle caress making him long for skin on skin contact.

Will took a step closer, reaching for Hannibal's own scarf. Hannibal stilled his hands for a moment and Will brushed his lips against Hannibal’s with a soft moan and Hannibal allowed him to bare his throat.

Hannibal carefully loosened the ties at Will's waist and tugged the hem of his shirt free. With minimum urging Will lifted his arms and allowed Hannibal to pull the thin shirt away. He admired Will's torso for a long moment before dragging a hand from his shoulder down to his tight trousers. His hand paused at the hem before moving over the fabric and squeezing the swelling between his legs. Will's moan was loud but hollow, and he rocked into Hannibal's hand hissing when it was snatched away. His bright eyes flew up to Hannibal's face.

“Don't perform for me. I don't want a whore, I want you,” Hannibal said softly, running his fingers through Will's curls.

“I've never wanted a man before, not the way I want you,” Will confessed, his cheeks warming slightly.

“I am flattered,” Hannibal replied with a sweet teasing smile. He drew Will into a warm embrace, claiming his lips in a deep sensual kiss. Will's body melted against him and he clumsily tugged at Hannibal's shirt, wanting to feel his heated skin without the barrier of fabric.

Hannibal nibbled gently on his bottom lip before releasing him and stepping back. He pulled the shirt over his head, stretching out his golden torso. His

shoulders were broad and strong with a thin layer of golden hair sprinkled over his chest. Despite his tough, muscled body, Hannibal's stomach had an inviting softness to it.

Will sealed his palms over Hannibal's slender waist, drawing circles with his thumb. He pressed a delicate kiss to Hannibal's clavicle, chasing it with a lower, lingering kiss. Will continued moving down his chest, leaving a trail of wet open mouth kisses along the way, until he knelt on the soft carpet at Hannibal's feet.

He nipped at the curve of Hannibal's waist as his fingers fought with the cords holding his trousers in place, mouth watering at the noticeable bulge they hid. He eagerly parted the fabric, pulled the trousers and linen underclothes down until his erection sprung free, already hard and pointing to Will's parted lips. Will licked his lips and wrapped his fingers around his thick shaft, stroking his hand over the silky flesh there, watching it with desire as it grew harder under his touch.

Hannibal let out a rumbling moan and Will arched his neck to see his head tilted back. Hannibal looked down into Will’s eyes with a fond smile, cupping Will’s face in one hand and running his thumb along the cheek bones. “How can such angelic eyes inspire such sinful desires?” He wondered aloud. Will gave Hannibal his most devilish grin and held his gaze as he swirled his tongue around the swollen head, relishing Hannibal's audible exhale.

The warm salty scent made him hunger for more and he sunk his head down onto Hannibal's length, lips stretching around the thick shaft. Will flicked his eyes back up to see Hannibal watching him intently, his breathing heavy. He felt trapped in the amber gaze, warmed by the flickering flames, he adjusted his head to stay holding eye contact and hollowed out his cheeks.

Hannibal's heavy breathing turned to soft moans, his hands tightening in Will's curls but not controlling his movements. Will began to suck harder when he felt Hannibal's member begin to throb and his breathing became unsteady. With something between a growl and a moan Hannibal stepped back, keeping Will in place. Will couldn't hold back a pitiful wine.

Hannibal quickly disposed of the rest of his clothes and took Will in his arms, kissing him firmly and walking him back towards the bed. When Will's legs hit the soft bed Hannibal gently pushed him down and knelt before him. He tugged off the gleaming shoes and slipped off his silk stocking, stroking over his lower legs.

Pressing his lips to Will's throat, he used his impressive body weight to lower Will onto his back. Hannibal dragged Will's ass off the bed and quickly removed Will's remaining garments until he lay naked on the bed. His fair, slender body looked pure and untouched against the royal blue bedding. Hannibal crawled above him and together they moved up the bed, kissing and touching.

The heavy drapes hanging from the dark wood frame cast shadows over their bodies and Will was entranced by the sight of Hannibal looming above him, back-lit by firelight and his eyes blazing red. With a deep kiss to Will's swollen lips, Hannibal moved down his body, sitting up between Will's legs and palming his round ass cheeks. He lifted Will's legs and pushed them back, exposing Will's puckered hole.

He sank down lower, letting Will's legs fall over his shoulders as he blew cool air over the sensitive opening, delighted to see it twitch. Hannibal licked around the hole, drenching the

wrinkled skin surrounding it and darting his tongue over the hole, gripping Will's hips when he began to squirm.

Hannibal moved in closer dragging his tongue over Will's asshole, feeling it relax and open up under his mouth. He sucked on his tongue to make it wetter and pressed it against Will's hole, just teasing the rim before drawing back then pressing back in past the ring of muscles. He wriggled his pointed tongue inside, exploring Will's inner passage and enjoying the soft silky flesh beneath his hands and encasing his tongue. Will was panting breathlessly when Hannibal twisted himself to glance up at him. He saw Will's eyes were wide and his flushed face slack with pleasure.

With a triumphant smile Hannibal dug his tongue in, pushing in as far in as he could and holding Will close. There was an audible wet sound when he pulled back and sat up, letting Will's legs fall open. He watched Will's flushed body as he sucked two fingers into his mouth, sucking wetly until his fingers were coated with drool. He brought his pointed finger to Will's quivering hole and gently probed it until it relaxed and he was able to easily slip the tip past the muscles there.

Will let out a soft, low moan as his body rolled on the bedding. The soft sound was so much more erotic than his whoreish moans as was his body's hypnotic movements. Hannibal slowly drove his finger deeper inside, burying himself to hilt. He bent his body to kiss Will's sweet lips again, tasting the sweet sounds of pleasure. Will let out a wordless gasp when a second finger was added, his body tensing before trembling violently. His dick was hard and red, dripping wetness onto his stomach. Hannibal began to thrust his fingers faster, revelling in Will's contented kitten purrs, mixed with choked gasps. His younger body was coated with a thin sheen of sweat and his eyes were open but hazy with pleasure.

With a sharp twist Hannibal withdrew his fingers drawing something between a whine and a growl from Will's pink lips. He stoked the boy's thigh as he drew his tongue over the puddle of fluid on Will's flat stomach. He lay along Will's body, letting him feel his solid weight as he reached into the bedside drawer and retrieved a glass vial of oil. He pushed back Will's knees, exposing his asshole fully, watching it wink in anticipation of his touch. Hannibal let the oil warm between his fingers before spreading it around Will's pretty little hole before pushing inside. Will's eyes were watching as he slicked up his dick with more of the clear oil until his hand easily slid over the thick length.

“Do you truly want this Will?”

“Yes. I want you Hannibal, want you so much.”

Hannibal pressed his forehead to Will's, caging him under his weight as he guided his member into Will’s hot and willing body. He let a long exhale once he was fully sheathed inside, the tight contractions of Will's passage had him trembling already.

Will flexed his legs and extended them to tangle with Hannibal's, planting a foot flat on his bed and using the traction to rock his hips up against Hannibal. “Move, please,” he pleaded in a soft, quivering voice.

Hannibal raised himself to look at Will's flushed face and starry eyes and slowly started to move. The sound of Will's high pitched keen, mixed with his own rumbling moan sounded loud in the soft dimly lit room, the rest of the world forgotten.

When Hannibal shifted his hips and hit a particularly sensitive spot Will gave a shout of pleasure and immediately covered his mouth. Hannibal seized the hand in his and pulled it to his mouth for a kiss. “No,” he whispered softly. “I want to hear you Will, as clearly as I see you. Gods, you feel like heaven,” Hannibal rotated his hips again, kissing the centre of Will's palm as he moaned, openly and honestly.

Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will, pulling him flush against his body as he set up a slow rhythm. Driving into him deeply and drawing back just as slowly, feeling every inch of Will, drinking in his scent as the heart grew around them.

As Hannibal drove him deeper and deeper into the mattress, Will's hands travelled over Hannibal's skin, clutching and stroking, unable to settle in one place, needing to touch him everywhere. His tongue slipped from his panting lips as and licked a stripe up Hannibal’s windpipe, travelling up to his ear to nip at the lobe. Hannibal took in a sharp breath as he trembled against and inside Will. Will jolted against him and wove his hands deep into Hannibal's hair, dragging face to his for a messy, breath-taking kiss. Desire was raging hot and powerful inside him, igniting his core and setting his heart alight as he tried to swallow the breath from Hannibal's lung unable to get close enough. His hips bucked up in time with Hannibal's thrusts unconsciously and he wrapped his legs around his slim waist, heels digging into Hannibal's plump ass.

As the moon moved across the navy sky they remained lost in one another in the private room, locked away from the outside world, the future and the past. Hannibal could feel his finish building, knowing he was incredibly close and gasping for air. He gripped Will dick firmly in the hand, pumping the length as sweat and pre-cum eased his way. He bowed his head, mouthing at the skin above Will's nipple, his lips and teeth leaving a purple mark on his soft skin.

Will's body tensed and his back arched deeply as he choked out Hannibal's name and he came with a silent scream. His body fell back slack in a swoon as Hannibal pounded into his limp body before exploding into his ass with an animal exclamation. His heavy body collapsed to the bed beside Will who immediately shifted closer, pressing against his warmth. “That was…” he gasped out, breaking into a tired laugh and letting the sentence hang.

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed, drawing circles on Will's damp shoulder. “Give me a moment,” he pressed a soft kiss to Will's temple before dragging himself from the bed and wetting a towel in his washbasin, watching Will in the mirror.

Will rolled onto his back, his chest sticky with drying fluid. He felt utterly discombobulated but in the most wonderful way. His insides felt exposed and raw and every inch of his body was still fizzing with excitement. He was floating peacefully and didn't notice when tears began to roll down his face.

Hannibal returned to the bed, his relaxed snake disappearing when he saw Will's tears. “What's wrong. Are you Hurt?” He asked gently, concerned he had been too wrapped up in his own explosive pleasure that he had inadvertently injured Will somehow. Hannibal had caused plenty of plain in his life but it was always with intent.

Will's brow furrowed and he realised his cheeks were wet and more tears were lazily falling. He wiped a cheek in confusion and burst into giggles. Burying his face in the pillow he continued laughing breathlessly, his shoulders shaking.

“Will, please tell me what is wrong?” Hannibal pressed, gently carding his fingers through Will's curls.

“I'm fine, sorry I'm laughing, not crying. I think I'm just… overwhelmed or something,” Will clarified, moving so Hannibal could see his bright smile. He wiped away the salty tracks,

leaving his eyes dry and bright. Hannibal chuckled softly and carefully cleaned Will's stomach and inner thighs. “I'm tired,” Will said through a yawn, clearly reluctant to leave the comfortable bed, or Hannibal's warm body.

“Come here,” Hannibal pulled Will into his embrace and pulled the soft covers over them both.

“Won't Matthew-”

“Sleep a little while,” Hannibal coaxed. “I'll wake you in time to get back to your own bed, just about.”

“Okay,” Will agreed readily, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder and easily drifting off. Hannibal would wake him soon, the sky was already turning grey as dawn crept closer but there was still a couple of hours spare. He was tempted to let Will sleep in late enough for Matthew to see he was spoken for but be felt Will may not thank him for that. The purple mark of his chest would be enough for now.

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Lady LiFe's Tattle Tales

Greetings gossips of our beloved ton. The season is coming up fast and as the seamstresses pick up their pace I am here to keep you up to date on all the important news.

One flame haired beauty will be wrapped in darker colours this season due to the passing of her dear Lord husband. We can hope their golden haired treasure can help her through her grief.

I hear on my latest shopping trip that our most prolific family will not be presenting anything to her majesty this season. How disappointing that we must all wait another season to see the

angel-faced beauty in all her glory. Can the fourth child truly live up to her reputation? If she must wait until the eldest is wedded we may never see her at all!

Across the street the squaking parrots are also curiously absent. Indeed two may be a little young for the marriage market but what of the elder two? A smart mama may choose to wait to present their daughters until they are at the most attractive, delay a presentation until she has dropped a few pounds of moved past teenage blemishes, but wait too long as you miss the window, condemning the ladies to a life of spinsterhood. A fate even more tragic when the ladies have no brother to care for them after their papa passes.

But there is good news. A certain sour-faced but rich young lady will finally begin her search for a husband to share her fortune. A fortune that has been depleted by the yards and yards of fine silks purchased at the modiste, as well as the rather usual designs requested. It would be such a shame if her hair was to overshadow the lovely dresses that made our very own French poodle so popular.

Most sadly of all is the continued absence of London's exotic flower. Those who have seen the famed forgein beauty say she is as sweet as she is beautiful but it seems her fearsome protecter will be keeping his sister in her ivory tower for another year.

But there is a silver lining in the form of a mysterious stranger. A flirtatious young footman was called to be valet to a young man staying with the Princess and the dragon. Little is known other than he has the most stunning blue eyes and chocolate curls, also his host summoned the tailor to the house ASAP to dress the newcomer in the finest new fashions. Who is this special mystery man? Perhaps a diversion? Another handsome potential match for the ambitions mamas to fling their daughters at? If nothing else he is a very handsome mystery.

Rest assured gossips, I will be keeping my eyes and ears on that bit of news. We will all know more when the only thing more frightening than an ambitious mama, a dowager lady, throws her famous season opening ball.

But no-one will know it before I.

Lady LiFe.

Chapter End Notes

I'll probably introduce the Bridgertons in the next chapter but you will see the morning after.

Points to anyone who guessing the identity of Lady Life.

As always, kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully received.

Until next time dearest, gentle readers: survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rude.

XXX

A Pleasant Awakening

Chapter Summary

The morning after the night before and a conversation at the Bridgerton house.

Chapter Notes

We meet the Bridgertons this chapter, if you have any questions about them do feel free to ask. If you have access then I highly recommend the show. Apologies to anyone reading the books, I have not so am going with the characters as they are in the show, especially my bi baby Benedict.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was lost in a pleasant arousing dream, not exactly a dream more like a vision of colours dancing before his eyes as pleasure coursed through him. He relaxed into it, feeling his whole body encased in softness, the softness of a feather bed. A bright spark of white was throbbing in the centre of the colourful display, growing and spreading through the others and taking over. Suddenly it exploded, conquering his vision and pleasure overcame him completely as his brain struggled towards the waking world. “Hannibal,” he gasped, his hands delving into soft strands as he came into the soft warm cavern of Hannibal’s mouth.

His eyes blinked open as Hannibal emerged from the covers, grinning and wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. “Finally,” he said with a twinkle. Will was still floating as he looked at Hannibal curiously. “You were proving very difficult to wake up,” he said by way of explanation.

“Well I was quite exhausted,” Will responded, feeling even less like moving now. “But I’m awake now.”

“Yes and dawn is approaching,” Hannibal said. “It may be best not to spread rumours when you have just arrived,” he said with obvious reluctance.

“I understand,” Will said, caressing Hannibal’s face gently. He sat up, stretching out his aching body and shifting to the edge of the bed.

When he stood up Hannibal pulled him close for a deep kiss and wrapped the soft pink robe around his shoulder, securing the tie around his waist. “If it was up to me I would keep you here all night, every night and a sizable chunk of the morning. Enjoy the rest of your sleep,”

he said affectionately. He tugged Will into an embrace. “In the future I will be taking you to bed much earlier.” he promised.

“Good,” Will said boldly.

With a final squeeze of Hannibal’s hand Will quietly slipped out of the room. The hallway was deserted and grey pre-dawn light came through one of the windows. It was summer so the sun would be up soon but he could manage another couple of hours of sleep before getting up for breakfast. Will quickly crept into his own room and slapped a hand to his mouth to keep from shouting in surprise. The room was not empty. There was a short couch in the seating area and Matthew was curled up asleep in his clothes. He must have ignored Hannibal’s statement that Will was able to undress himself, though it turned out he did not have too. Will silently placed his clothes in the wash basket and slid undergarments back on before disrobing.

He was uncomfortable sleeping with someone nearby but he had no idea when Matthew had fallen asleep and to wake him now would certainly alert him that he had not been in his own bed all night. Will huddled under the covers, coving his entire body up to his chin and facing away from Matthew. He was still exhausted and sleep came faster than he expected, along with a fainter version of his usual nightmare.

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Just a few hours later the ton was clamouring for the newest issue of London’s most famous gossip rag. Lady LiFe’s Tattle Tale.

Eloise Bridgerton was one of the first to grab an issue, for all her brains the gossip rag was a vice of hers. If questioned she argued that it was inspirational to see a woman making money from writing, not that she needed it. The suspected author had inherited a sizable inheritance when her much older husband passed away at the beginning of the summer, leaving her very rich and a single mother to the heir.

“I really do not understand why Lady LiFe bothers not to call people by her name. She is hardly discreet. Though she does bring up Daphne’s beauty,” Eloise announced, smirking when she saw her older sister try to hide a smile.

“Eloise why do you insist on reading that silly magazine, it is nothing but speculation and rumours,” her Mother scolded.

“Speculation and rumours about this family and my friends,” Eloise pointed out. “She mentions the Featherington’s too, calling them squawking parrots and Misha too, the princess and the dragon,” she quoted.

“Does she say anything about the rest of the family?” Hyacinth asked, joining Eloise on the couch to look over the page.

“Hyacinth no, it is bad enough your sisters listen to this chatter I won’t have it polluting your mind too,” Violent said, though the girls were not listening.

“She wonders if Daphne will not be presented until Anthony is married though he seems to be determined to avoid it forever,” Eloise told her.

“You won’t make her wait that long will you Mama?” Hyacinth asked in distress. Unlike Eloise, Hyacinth looked forward to her own coming out, one she would not have until Daphne and Eloise had their own celebrations.

“Daphne is dropping her hemlines this year and she will be presented next year as was always planned,” Violet confirmed. “Anthony’s decisions, foolish as they may be, will not change that,” she sent a disapproving glance towards the window where the three eldest Bridgertons were fencing while their younger brother watched them, laughing when Anthony knocked Colin onto his back. “Are you sure you do not wish to be presented with your sister?” She asked Eloise.

“I’d be happy not to be presented at all so for now I will accept the delay,” Eloise responded. The statement was true but if her Mother was truly honest it would be ridiculous to announce them both in the same season. Daphne was the perfect debutante, marriage minded and accomplished. Eloise was just as smart, possibly more so and she sang well enough and had some piano skills but compared to her perfect sister Eloise would look a fool. She would have been happy to remain unmarried but if she must be thrust onto the mart she had no desire to compete with Daphne who would no doubt find a fine match her first season.

“Who is she?” Hyacinth asked, taking the paper from her sister. “The F key is fine in the text so the capital F in life must be deliberate,” she said thoughtfully.

“Up until three years ago she was Miss L,” Eloise informed her, then she changed to Lady LiFe,” she supplied.

Hyacinth read over the article again. “She is sparing with her compliments, mostly insulting them or someone in their family in the same breath. She even calls Madame Delecour a poodle,” she went on, thoughtfully. “But whoever this flame-haired beauty is, she is sympathetic towards. Lady Fenwick has red hair,” she checked. “What was her maiden name?”

“Lounds,” Eloise said with a smile.

“So Lounds and Fenwink, L-F LiFe,” she said with a triumphant smile.

“A cat could figure that out once they have the evidence,” Eloise said, not unkindly.

“I bet Gregory couldn’t,” Hyacinth argued.

“You are right but in a few years he will be able to whack other men with sticks so it hardly matters,” she answered with a smirk.

“I am also sympathetic to Lady Fenwick,” Daphne interjected, giving up on her piano practice. “Kindness is not a bad thing.”

“Quite right,” Violet agreed.

“Luckily it is also an attractive quality,” Eloise said with a sickly sweet smile. She plucked the rag from Hyacinth’s smaller hands and stood.

“Hey!”

“You should have saved your pin money instead of adding more decoration to your hair,” Eloise advised, tugging on Hyacinth’s new ribbon. “I’m going to visit with Penelope,” she told her Mother, Violet nodded her permission.

“Yes, please take that awful rag away from your sister,” Eloise smiled and took the paper with her.

“I miss Francesca,” Hyacinth sighed, slumping back on the sofa as Daphne began to play the piano again. “Her music was better too,” she mumbled.

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Will felt surprisingly well rested when Matthew woke him the next morning, in fresh clothes. It was later than usual and clearly his valet was not pleased with his late night. He did not say anything directly to Will but he spoke sparingly and his movements were less gentle until it came to styling Will’s hair.

He coated his hands in oil and combed through his tangled curls with the same gentle movements, separating the strands carefully and massaging his scalp. “You can cut it if you like,” Matthew commented quietly.

“Count Lecter suggested I keep it long,” Will responded as Matthew twirled a few locks around his fingers, encouraging the natural curls.

“You are not looking to marry his lordship,” Matthew said with a hint of sourness. Will stepped away and looked at him in surprise. “I only mean that his preferences are not important, in a month you’ll be courting debudants,” he said, guiding Will closer so he could neaten the hair brushing his collar.

The scarf around his neck was still loose and Matthew fingers travelled over the small collection of perfumes before choosing a small bottle that smelt of something warm and spicy and very strong It was similar to the cream Hannibal had objected to though Will did not see the problem and Matthew applied it rather liberally before tightening his navy cravat, arranging to cover his neck right to the chin. He chose a pewter knotted broach to hold it in place. “Lovely,” Matthew said, finally cracking a smile. Will checked his reflection in the mirror, he wasn’t sure about today’s attire.

Last night his clothes had been dark but also rich and ornate, today it was different. The dark shades were muted and seemed to overwhelm his slender body, the clothes were still fine quality but it didn’t fit as well. “Do you think?” He asked with uncertainty.

“Of course,” Matthew answered, adjusting the brooch with tenderness. “You’ll be devastating once his lordship has you all dressed up like a proper gentleman.”

A sharp knock came to the door and when Matthew opened it, Francis stood there, his presence calm and oddly soothing rather than intimidating. “Good morning,” he greeted. “I brought a new shaving cream,” he said, handing it to Matthew. “I think you will enjoy it,” he added with a tight smile to Will. Will ran a hand over his skin, it was still smooth, he never had to shave often but he was grateful for the new cream.

“Thank you,” Will answered. He had expected to blush furiously every time he saw Francis but he acted as though he had witnessed nothing and even seemed slightly less intimidating than he had before. Will was starting to think he liked the stoic man. Hannibal certainly trusted him and that was a massive boost in his favour.

Matthew accepted the cream and sniffed it, making a face before handing it to Will. He unscrewed the top and inhaled, a smile coming to his face. The scent was light and citrusy, bright and clean and it reminded him of the perfume Hannibal had chosen. Will’s mind drifted a little, he’d noticed Hannibal’s dark, earthy scents even before last night but this was different and the tub was full. Hannibal had not simply asked Francis to send some of his own; he had bought a new tub with a scent he liked on Will. “It’s very nice Franics, you have excellent taste, thank you,” he responded, his tone almost questioning.

Francis’s lips twitched. “Lord Lecter selected in himself, Mister Graham,” Will did blush at that even as Francis departed and Matthew placed the foam by the washbasin.

Will could feel himself smiling. It was silly, he knew, Hannibal wanted him to smell pleasing but every gift made him feel warmer in his stomach as did the hand me down clothes and his small smile. Will had been alone since he was young and even then he was often neglected, his Father had been a good man and loved him even though Will killed his Mother coming into the world. But he had to work to keep them both fed and watered so Will was often left to amuse himself. The inn slash brothel was the closest thing he had to a childhood home so most of his time was spent with the working women and occasional man which the main pimp, an overweight inebriate, had hated, at least until Will had grown into his long awkward limbs. Once his Father passed Will quickly sought work elsewhere. Having Hannibal think of him, pay attention to him, was intoxicating and made his stomach flutter.

“Will!” Matthew's voice was loud and close, causing Will to jump. “Sorry you were miles away,” Matthew said with concern.

“Sorry, I’m just tired, need breakfast,” Will mumbled, embarrassed at his love sick behaviour.

“Yeah,” Matthew muttered, eyes on the floor.

“Matthew,” Will started cautiously, not sure about what words to choose. “I am sorry for my late return last night. I think there was some miscommunication. I would not have stayed up so late had I realised you would be forced to wait up for me,” he said with a kind smile.

“It is my job to assist you Will, even when Count Lecter sees fit to relieve me early,” he said, his voice turning colder around Hannibal’s name. “What kept you up so late?” He asked. Will knew it was overly familiar and none of his business but Matthew had been so kind to him the day before and he wanted that friendly atmosphere back.

“Probably sleeping in the middle of the day,” he answered with a short forced laugh.

“You were up alone?” He pressed.

“No, I was talking with Hannibal and it got late,” he answered, feeling like he was defending himself and beginning to get irritated.

“You were with him, not Lady Mischa?” He asked, overly interested.

“Yes,” he answered, confusion clearing. “Oh, I think I understand. Lady Mischa is every bit as lovely as everyone has told me but I know enough about this world to know that to stay up late with her, unchaperoned, is completely inappropriate, especially as she has not formally come out yet. You don’t have to worry, I have no intention of ruining her reputation.”

“Of course not,” Matthew answered with a resigned shake of his head. “You should go join the house for breakfast, I will see you before dinner,” Matthew said eventually, again too bold but Will did not care. Instead he smiled and headed downstairs, forgetting everything when he reached the dining room.

The table was full of sweet cakes and pastries and Will suddenly realised how ravenous he was, his mouth watering. Mischa and Hannibal were already seated and eating; it was clear Will had walked in on an intense family discussion.

“No, these gossip pages are a waste of money and responsible for the death of far too many trees, I will not have them in this house,” Hannibal said firmly.

“You know I will only read El or Pen’s copy,” Mischa argued, raising her chin in defiance.

“At least it keeps you from memorising quite useless slander,” Hannibal said. “Good morning Will,” Hannibal greeted warmly.

“Good morning,” Will greeted, his face almost splitting with a grin.

“You look happy this morning,” Mischa commented pleasantly.

“I slept well,” Will answered, not a total lie, his limited sleep had been restorative. Mischa looked as beautiful as she had the night before dressed in a sky blue day dress with her hair piled up atop her head, the elegance of her long limbs even more obvious with her neck exposed. Will was struck by her loveliness once again as he took a seat, once again between her and Hannibal.

“I’m afraid you’ve caught us in the middle of a rather silly debate,” Mischa confessed. “Hannibal is being unreasonable again.”

“Oh?” Will raised an eyebrow, anticipating amusement.

“He often is,” she confided in a stage whisper.

“While Mischa is being childish,” Hannibal chimed in with mild disapproval.

“You are mentioned as am I,” she argued. “Often. Do you expect me to be presented with no knowledge of what has been said about me?” She asked.

“These pages do not contain facts and any man worthy of your attention will recognise that,” Hannibal told her.

“What about other women?” Mischa countered. “Ladies read these pages and they talk. Will, what do you think?” Will had been watching the exchange in silence while devouring a heavy sticky slice on honey cake.

“I’m not sure what you are discussing,” he admitted.

“I’m sorry, we are talking about London's most accurate gossip magazine,” she explained.

“A gossip magazine?” Will asked.

“Oh yes, a mysterious woman calling herself Lady LiFe collects all the news about what’s going on in the upcoming season and after a summer of silence she is back! Hannibal does not let me get my own copy,” Mischa explained.

“Why has she been silent?” Will asked, not really understanding the appeal or Hannibal’s objections.

“Hardly anyone is in London out of season, some are still at their country estates now. Whoever she is, she only prints during the social season,” Mischa told him.

“So it’s a newspaper?” Will asked.

“No,” Hannibal interjected. “It is a gossip rag, this ‘Lady LiFe’, who is not so mysterious, only reports pointless speculations about whoever she finds interesting,” he said with a scoff of derision.

“You don’t know for certain who she is,” Mischa told him.

“Yes I do and so do you, so does everyone with half a brain. How old is Hyacinth now, ten? I’m sure we could ask her and she’d confirm my theory,” Hannibal argued. “The woman behind the poisonous pen is Lady Fredrica Fenwick, hence why the author had not a critical word to say about her marriage to a man easily old enough to be her father or speculated on the father of her child.”

“Hannibal!” Mischa exclaimed.

“I do not mean anything by it, the little lord is the image of his and I do not doubt his parentage but was the author anyone but Lady Fenwick she would have sowed the seeds of doubt simply to generate sales,” Hannibal said.

“How do we know the writer isn’t Lord Fenwick, hoping to anonymously flatter his wife?” Will suggested.

“A romantic idea,” Hannibal praised. “However he passed away early this summer. He was one of the least annoying ton members although why on Earth he married that woman I have no idea.”

“They fell in love,” Mischa insisted. “He was not her only offer, plenty of younger men just as rich threw their hat in the ring, she wanted him.”

“How do you know all this?” Will asked.

“From the paper,” Mischa supplied. “Hannibal refuses to allow me to spend my own pin money on it but he cannot keep me from reading my friends’ copy.”

“So many books in the library and you want that,” Hannibal said with disapproval.

“So?” Will asked.

“Excuse me?” Hannibal asked.

“If it’s all just meaningless chatter then why bother banning it?” Will asked. “And if all the other ladies are going to be chatting about it you could be at a disadvantage,” Will suggested. “If every other lady coming out spoke fluent Greek wouldn’t you want to do the same?” Will asked.

“I’m so glad you bought him here,” Mischa said with a triumphant smile, reaching over to squeeze Will’s hand. Will smiled at that, especially when her hand lingered. Hannibal had him head over heels, filling him with a burning passion, but Willd did feel a growing affection for the woman he was intended for. Hannibal was right, Mischa was incredibly easy to love.

“I suppose your argument has some merit,” Hannibal admitted begrudgingly. “It is your pin money to waste, although there are some ribbon in the windows of the modiste that would suit Fortuna very well,” he added.

“Who is Fortuna?” Will asked.

“My horse,” Mischa answered. “She is beautiful, maybe something new for her would be better,” Hannibal hid his smile behind a slice of plum cake but Mischa noticed. “But I will still be reading the latest issue.”

“If you wish,” Hannibal said mildly, dabbing his mouth and standing. “I do need to check on the stables this morning. I recall you said you like horses, would you care to join me?” Hannibal asked.

“Yes, I love horses,” Will said eagerly, standing up.

“You can finish your breakfast,” Hannibal said, a soft amusement warming his eyes.

“I’m done,” Will said. “Let’s go.”

“Very well,” Hannibal said. “Give my best to the ladies if I do not return before they visit,” he bid Mischa, who nodded and continued nibbling on a light lemon cake.

Hannibal led Will out into the gardens, the rainstorm had cleared the air some and it was pleasantly warm. They walked slowly as Will took in the neat flower beds and blooming trees. “It’s beautiful out here,” Will observed.

“Yes, did you truly sleep well last night?” Hannibal asked.

“Better than usual,” Will answered honestly.

“How do you usually sleep?” Hannibal asked.

“It depends on where I can find a bed,” Will replied. Hannibal waited for him to elaborate. “I have recurring nightmares,” he admitted.

“You appeared most peaceful,” Will commented.

“I didn’t dream until I got back to my room,” Will explained. “Even then they weren’t quite as vivid as usual.”

“Perhaps having another presence is good for your mind,” Hannibal suggested with a slight smirk. Will thought about mentioning Matthew’s presence in his room but thought better of it. “I do believe in the theory that dreams have meaning, would you care to share?” He asked.

“They would bore you,” WIll said quickly, eyes dropping to his shoes. If there was one thing that he wanted to hide more than his dreams it was the reason for them.

“I doubt that,” Hannibal pressed, watching Will closely.

“Just bad memories,” Will clarified. “Nothing to analyse.”

“You seem uncomfortable,” Hannibal said, voice gentle but unable to hide his curiosity.

“I’m tired.”

“You said you slept well.”

“I did but not for long,” Will argued, getting irritated now.

Hannibal paused before responding. “If you do not wish to share I will not push you,” he eventually said, sweeping up Will's hand and pressing a sweet kiss to his inner wrist.

“Thank you,” Will said, feeling like a stubborn child.

“We may both have our secrets, for now,” Hannibal said.

“Now I want to know yours,” Will said with a short laugh. Hannibal chuckled along with him.

“Some I will take to my grave,” Hannibal promised.

“Others?” Will asked.

“Others are not mind alone to share,” Hannibal answered.

The conversation finished when they arrived at the stables. The windows were high up and rather dusty leaving the structure shady and cool, the main source of light from the open doors. The horses stepped forward to investigate the sounds. “Hello Nelly old girl,” Hannibal said softly, stroking the nose of the horse nearest the door. Her body was a dull grey and her mane and hair was a dark ash grey but when Hannibal stepped forward she bumped his shoulder. “Nelly is friendly. Come say hello.”

“Hey girl,” Will said, petting her neck.

“Nelly is an old lady now but Mischa learned to ride on her so she will live out her days here in comfort,” Hannibal said affectionately. “A gentle soul,” Hannibal petted her again and moved deeper into the stable.

A couple of stalls down were two younger and stronger looking horses. One was huge, jet back as was his tail and man, next to him was a smaller chestnut horse whose ruby coloured hair gleamed even in the low light. Her mane was plaited with pale blue ribbons. “This is Fortuna, Mischa’s mare,” Hannibal said, leading Will to the chestnut mare who regarded him with curiosity before nudging his face in a bid for attention. “Much like her owner, Fortuna loves everyone she meets,” he assured Will as he moved over to the darker horse. “Thor,” he said proudly.

“Yours?” Will asked, keeping a little more distance between himself and the inky black animal who was watching him with intensity.

“Yes, he is from a champion bloodline and runs like the wind, a fine jumper too” he said fondly. He retrieved an apple from a bag a few feet away and handed it to Will. Will let himself be drawn closer to the massive horse. Hannibal took Will’s hand in his and laid it out flat with the apple in the centre before raising it towards Thor’s mouth. He stood close behind Will, his cheek pressed to Will’s with his free arm tight around Will’s waist. Thor looked between the two of them before bowing his head to accept the snack. “Now he will love you forever,” he whispered in Will’s ear. “I promise My handsome boy,” he said fondly, patting the horse's neck. “This was what I was hoping to show you,” he said, pulling Will away from Thor and towards a stall at the back.

There was a pale white horse in the stall, looking towards them but unsure if she wished to come forward. Hannibal offered her an apple and coaxed her closer with soft words. “There’s a good girl,” he said as she took the treat.

“She’s stunning,” Will said. The young filly had a coat as white as snow and her mane and tail shone like silver in the low light, she was the smallest and absolutely lovely. Her lower legs were a light grey and she moved with admirable grace.

“She arrived yesterday, also of champion stock but a mild leg injury means she will sadly never be a winner in her own right,” Hannibal said.

“Don’t they normally put them out of their misery if they can’t race?” Will asked.

“What misery? The injury healed quickly but had she continued racing it was likely to happen again, I acquired her for a very low price,” Hannibal said, gently stroking her face as he relaxed for him. “I have a mind to breed her with Thor, they both have excellent genes. But right now the young filly is still settling in,” he said. “She will need a name, do you have a suggestion?”

Will patted the filly's neck, she was a true beauty from nose to hoof, he looked between her and Thor who was craning his neck to see the new arrival. They would make a handsome pair. “You have a norse God already,” he stated.

“And Fortuna, the roman Goddess of fortune,” Thor added.

“Persephone?” Will suggested.

“Hades’s Queen.”

“Or captive,” Will said. “Depending on the version you hear. What do you think?”

“I think it is perfect,” Hannibal said, pressing a kiss to Will’s cheek. He turned Will to face him fully and pulled him into a deep kiss.

“Did you just lure me out here so we could have some privacy,” Will asked, kissing him back with a smile.

“No, I hoped you would join me for a ride, privately,” Hannibal said. “What do you think?”

“Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Matthew is quite the jealous boy but it's not exactly unfounded Will is very much spoken for, at least until Mischa is available then things have the opportunity to change. Let me know if there is something specific you wish to see.

If you want your very own fic, whatever you wish then check out the latest chapter of captive as it's competition time!

As always, kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully received.

Until next time dearest gentle readers: survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rude.

XXX

Skinny Dipping

Chapter Summary

Mischa indulges in some girl talk as Will and Hannibal frolick in the sunshine.

Chapter Notes

A little more of the Bridgerton characters this chapter. I would recommend the show to anyone, especially to those who enjoyed tight trousers and wet shirts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Not long after Hannibal and Will had set off on their ride Penelope and Eloise arrived at the grand house, settling in the drawing room with Mischa to chat about the latest gossip.

“I thought you were hoping to be presented this season?” Penelope asked Mischa after the rag had been thoroughly read and those spoken of identified.

“I was but now that Hannibal had taken in Will he won't be able to chaperone me properly. He wanted me to wait a little while longer anyway but I am seeing Madame Delecour in a couple of days to have my hemlines lowered and Hannibal had promised I can come out next season,” Mischa said with excitement.

“Better you than I,” Eloise commented. “I wish my Mother was as reluctant to deal with the marriage mart as your brother.”

“I’m glad you and I will be dealing with this together,” Penelope told Mischa. “You’re much better company than either of my sisters,” she giggled. “Are you sure you won’t come out with us El?”

“Absolutely not!” Eliose responded. “I will be spending this season and the next trying my hardest to avoid this whole arcane ritual.”

“You do not find it romantic at all?” Mischa asked. “The parties, all the decor and shows and the dancing. It’s like a fairytale.”

“I always preferred gothic romance to fairytales,” Eloise answered with a small smile. “But no I do not find it romantic to be dressed up like a cupcake and paraded around like a prize pig, hoping that any man will choose you whereas your opinion is not taken into account at all. Then, if you are successful in how you smile and simper you spend the next day doing the same thing while also pretending to be swept away with terrible poetry and gifts until eventually you pick the least objectionable of however many suitors you are able to acquire and that is it, or the rest of your life,” she stated.

“You make it sound so tragic,” Penelope observed.

“It is tragic. So many intelligent women marry some ridiculous man and are never heard from again. They settle down in the country and have far too many screaming children,” she continued.

“Children are delightful,” Mischa objected.

“But life is over once you have married. We are taught how to attract a man and that is it all. You will have fulfilled your purpose within a year and then it’s done,” Eloise claimed. “Tragic.”

“Not if you marry the right man,” Mischa told her. “If Hannibal were to arrange a marriage with a terrible man then I would share your view.”

“And you trust him not to?” Eloise asked.

“Absolutely.”

“Good.”

“So tell us about this Will,” Penelope requested. “Is he as attractive as Lady LiFe says?”

“Yes,” Mischa said with a light blush. “He is very lovely and sweet. He has the most charming laugh, beautiful eyes and a very pleasing smile. But you’ll meet him yourself on my birthday.”

“I look forward to it,” Penelope said.

“Is he clever?” Eloise asked.

“Hannibal likes him so I expect so,” she answered. “He only arrived yesterday so I’m afraid I don’t have much to say but yes he is very attractive,” she answered.

“Do you think he is after a wife?” Penelope asked.

Eloise scoffed. “I can’t imagine why not,” Mischa said.

“Because he is young and pretty and a man thus has options other than marriage,” Eloise suggested. “Not all men must marry, Antony is determined to be a bachelor for life as is your brother.”

“Antony has three younger brothers to provide an heir,” Penelope said. “It would be different if he were the only boy.”

“Hannibal is an only son,” Eloise pointed out.

“Hannibal will do as he wants regardless. I suppose his titles and fortune will pass to my husband or son,” Mischa said. “I think Will is an only child.

“Is he rich?” Eloise asked.

“Not as far as I know, he’s not titled. Hannibal told me he was a relative of a friend and he’s taken him in for charity's sake,” she filled them in. “I think you will both like him.”

“You like him,” Eloise pointed out.

“Of course,” Mischa answered innocently.

“I think she means more than like,” Penelope informed her with a slight smile.

“Why not marry him and escape all the hoopla,” Eloise suggested.

“I want the hoopla,” Mischa said. “You marry him!”

“Not if I can help it!” The three girls giggled.

“We really shouldn’t be talking this way,” Mischa pointed out. “None of us are open to proposals yet, it’s improper.”

“Ladies talk, who can it harm?” Eloise asked.

“That depends who is listening,” Penelope observed. “But Mischa is right.”

“Then should we talk about silks or flower arrangements?” Eloise asked, as though these were dire topics of conversations.

“On the subject of clothes I happened to be visiting the modiste at the same time as Cressida Cowper,” Penelope informed them. “Lady LiFe is not exaggerating. Madame Delcour looked ready to strangle her with the quite ridiculous amount of fabric she ordered, the designs sounded horrendous.”

Mischa poured more tea. “Do share, I am starved for girl talk.”

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It wasn’t until Will had agreed that he realised he had never actually ridden before and it seemed there was no stable boy to assist him. He tried to mimic Hannibal’s movements but Persephone was more nervous than Thor and took a lot more coaxing to even come out of her stall. Will was able to soothe her with soft words and gentle pats but the extra time it took meant he missed how the saddle was secured on the horse.

He stood awkwardly by the filly, unsure what to do. Hannibal noticed and smiled softly. “Have you ever ridden before?” He asked.

“I don’t think so,” Will mumbled. “No, I’ve never had a reason to.”

“Then this will be your first lesson,” Hannibal said pleasantly, retrieving a saddle from the wall.

With no servants around they were relaxed together with no-one to catch them and no reason to keep a respectable distance. Hannibal saddled up Will’s horse, guiding him through the movement and how to secure the equipment, almost holding Will in his arms as he did so. Will listened but couldn’t help but lean back slightly, enjoying Hannibal’s warmth. “Are you listening, Will?” He asked, voice playful.

“Yes,” Will answered, pressing himself against Hannibal.

“I don’t think you have absorbed a single thing I have said,” he continued, a hand coming to rest on Will’s hip.

“I’m listening,” he insisted.

“You’re distracting me,” Hannibal corrected.

“I can do both,” Will said with a cheeky smile.

Hannibal chuckled and lightly slapped his ass. He took down to bridles, handing the smaller one to Will. “Here, I’ll talk you through it,” he took his time placing the harness on Thor, allowing Will to mimic his movements, impressed with his quick learning. Thor was fussing, unused to slow movements and ready to be outside.

Hannibal attached a bag of snacks and drinks to Thor’s saddle and checked the length of Will stirrups. He showed Will how to mount properly without spooking the nervous horse, keeping a hand firm on his thigh until he was settled before mounting his own stead.

“She should follow along on instinct but I will make sure you don’t fall behind,” he said, urging Thor ahead. Persephone followed them out and soon they were riding parallel. Will found it more comfortable than he expected, even with the soreness from the night before and the sweet smell of flowerbeds hung in the air.

“We are close to some popular parks if you would like some introductions. I’m sure once you are spotted there will be many a mama desperate to make your acquaintance,” Hannibal informed him.

“Why?” Will asked.

“You are new and lovely thus very interesting,” Hannibal told him. “You must beware of their intentions or who will be made to dance until your shoes fall apart.”

“Can I not turn down a dance?” Will asked, biting at his lower lip.

“You will not be asked to dance but the more determined mamas have many ways to trick a gentleman into asking for their daughter's hand,” Hannibal warned him. “The trick is to escape before they trap you and to only agree to dance with ladies you find least objectionable, perhaps those already betrothed.”

“Will you teach me how?” Will asked.

“Of course,” Hannibal said. “You are my responsibility this season, I will be watching over you at every dance.”

“I don’t know how to dance either,” Will mumbled.

“That won’t be a problem,” Hannibal assured him. “I have seen the way you move, in and out of the bedroom and your natural grace will serve you well.”

Will blushed furiously at the comment, more so when Hannibal winked. “Tease.”

“You can join Mischa lessons and I will help with your practice,” Hannibal told him. “Don’t worry, I will make sure you know everything you need to.”

“So I’ll be good enough for Mischa?” Will asked.

“My sister’s happiness is important to me,” he looked at Will for a long moment.

“She’s wonderful,” Will admitted, speaking honestly. “Even with, what we’re doing, I really like her and I'd like to make her happy.”

“A solid basis for a marriage,” Hannibal agreed.

“I am still concerned about her finding out what we’re doing and repercussions,” Will admitted.

“I’m not,” Hannibal said lightly, rounding a corner to reveal a sparkling lake.

“Wow,” Will said, in awe of the natural beauty.

“The trails where people who wish to be seen are on the other side of those trees but here we are hidden from any eyes, just us two. Are you hungry?” He asked.

“I could eat,” Will agreed.

They dismounted from the horses and tied them to a tree in the shade. The two moved closer, becoming more familiar with each other. Will watched them for a couple of seconds before taking a seat next to Hannibal, accepting a box of succulent strawberries. “Delicious,” Will commented.

“I have high expectations when it comes to food, only the best for me and mine,” Hannibal said. The final word made Will’s stomach swoop and he could feel his face warm. “Yes, that does include you,” he added.

“I hope you do not let these worries about discovery trouble you too much, the only person likely to notice is Francis, as long as we do not flaunt it,” Hannibal said. “My bigger concern is that I will never have another lover quite as lovely or responsive as you.”

“We have a year, you may be bored of me by then,” Will joked.

“A very slim possibility,” Hannibal admitted. “But yes we do have a year.

“I need to go to my own room in future,” Will informed him. “Then come to yours once Matthew has left.”

“He is unhappy about being relieved in the evenings?” Hannibal asked, amused but also confused.

“He didn’t leave, last night,” Will admitted awkwardly. “When I got back to my room he was asleep on the couch.”

“Ah,” Hannibal said, his tone becoming chilly.

“When I woke up in the morning he was changed so he must have left after I fell asleep but I don’t know whether he was waiting up for me or something,” Will yammered, nervously.

“Did you speak to him about it? I did make sure to tell him he had the night off,” Hannibal asked.

“Yes, I mentioned it, that I didn’t realise he’d be waiting for me but he just said that it’s job and asked what kept me up,” Will said.

“What did you tell him?” Hannibal asked with curiosity.

“I told him that I wasn’t tired because I had a midday nap and that you and I stayed up talking,” Will answered. “I think he was concerned that I was alone with Mischa late at night.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal mused. “Matthew may not have been the best choice of valet.”

“No, don’t fire him, that's not what I meant,” Will said quickly. “I don’t want someone to lose their job, especially since he was just trying to protect her reputation.”

“We can give him more time,” Hannibal said. “But please do not hide it if he does overstep his bounds. The last guest he served was delighted with his services but that does not mean I trust him,” Hannibal said firmly. “Francis has proved his loyalty to this family, I do not give that level of trust easily.”

“Is Francis…” Will wasn't sure how to end the sentence. Talking about the subject still felt taboo, dangerous.

“I have no idea,” Hannibal answered. “It is not my business so I have never asked. If you have a burning curiosity he will most likely answer honestly.”

“No, it's his business either way. I only, I wonder why you trust him,” Will said.

“I told you some of my deepest secrets were not mine alone to tell,” Hannibal said. “But let us not speak of darkness when we have the sun and privacy,” with a smile he slid his hand under Will's jacket, encouraging him to slide it off. He fingers the pewter pin on his scarf with a mild frown. “Where did this come from?” He wondered.

“Wherever the others did, I guess,” Will said, confused. “I don’t know, I let Matthew pick it.”

“No, this did not come from me. Are you particularly fond of it?” He asked.

“I prefer the ones with the silver around the jewel like the one I wore last night,” Will answered honestly. “I know nothing about jewellery,” he admitted.

Hannibal unclipped the broach and tucked it safely in his pocket with a thoughtful look. Will shuffled closer and removed the clip from Hannibal's cravat, loosening the fabric. Hannibal

forgot about the ornament and smiled as his scarf fell to the ground and he shrugged off his jacket before baring Will's neck.

With Hannibal's hand in his hair, Will let his head be guided back, stretching his neck out as Hannibal pressed hot wet kisses along with length before stealing his breath with a demanding kiss, his hands shoving Will's shirt up. “Take off your pants,” he urged against Will's lips, parting long enough to toss away his own shirt and kick off his shoes.

“What, here?” Will gasped, as Hannibal's hands moved to loosen his pants. “Stop, we can't um…. make love here,” he said, unsure of what words were appropriate.

Hannibal chuckled at thus, his voice rich and smokey. “I suggested nothing of the sort my darling,” Hannibal teased, stripping Will of his shirt and stockings, leaving him only in his open pants and looking utterly debauched. With a smile he stood and shed the rest of his clothes before approaching the lake completely nude.

Will caught himself staring and did not care to stop. The hot weather had them both sweating and the sun glinted off Hannibal's muscles, his skin gleaming gold. There were a few silver strands mixed with the gold of his hair and the sun highlighted them. His eyes glittered as he glanced at Will over his shoulder.

“Will you be joining me?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No,” Will responded with a laugh.

“No?” Hannibal repeated, crouching to dip a hand in the water. “As your doctor I should point out that staying cool on a hot day is vital for your health,” he joked, rising and stalking towards Will.

“I can't swim,” Will protested.

“I'll keep hold of you,” Hannibal promised, looming over Will. He quieted Will's protests with playful kisses as he stripped him of his remaining garment. “Come on.”

“I'm not getting in,” Will argued.

“Yes you are,” with a feral grin Hannibal hoisted Will's slender body over his shoulder and strode towards the water.

“Hannibal stop it!” Will half-squealed through laughter. “We could get caught,” he insisted.

“Keep squealing and we will,” Hannibal told him, carrying Will into the cold water but keeping his arms around him as he promised. He swam them to the centre of the glittering water, keeping hold until Will was safely treading water.

“Not long, I don't want to get caught,” Will responded nervously.

“If anyone is foolish enough to stumble upon us I promise I will take all the blame,” Hannibal soothed. “Although I don't know if anyone would believe me, those bright eyes and plump lips. You are quite the tempting seductress.”

Will's face fell and he drifted a little further away. “I don't like that,” he said quietly.

“Don't like what, dear?” Hannibal asked, pulling him in close. “Talk to me.”

“I only whored myself out when I had to. I never enjoyed it and only pretended to if the guy wanted that, most didn't care. I never had a pimp or lived in a brothel or molly house because I didn't want to be owned, told what I wanted. I don't like to be called a seductress or slut. I know I never did it because I wanted to, no matter how pretty I am,” Will said, facing the ripples in the water.

“Did you want to be with me?” Hannibal asked in concern.

“Yes,” Will answered immediately. “I meant all of it, with you, it felt right,” he promised, with a slow kiss. It soon became heated and Will wrapped his legs around Hannibal’s waist. “The water is far too cold for this.”

“You are right,” Hannibal admitted. “We should dry off and head back to the house. He lifted Will out of the water and carried him out, bridal style, and laid him on the grass beneath the blazing sun. Hannibal flopped down next to him, admiring his body as the water droplets dried on his skin. “If things proceed as planned you will never have to degrade yourself like that again,” he promised, kissing Will on the cheek. “I do not seek to own or control you but I do intend to take care of you. We will be family.”

“I miss having a family,” Will admitted, toying with Hanninal's long fingers. “I never thought I'd have one after losing my Dad.”

“None of us know what the future holds,” Hannibal told him. Will nodded and closed his eyes as Hannibal kissed him.

He did not know what the future might hold but he knew that if Hannibal was fully aware of his past; he would never allow Will into his family.

He would be right not to.

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know if there are scenes or characters you wish to see. You inspire me.

As always, kudos and comments bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully received.

Survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rude.

XXX

Shopping

Chapter Summary

> Mischa visits the modiste while Hannibal takes Will to Barnabus Stinson to be properly attired. People just can't keep their eyes off Will.

Chapter Notes

> For those of you still not watching Bridgeton, Madame Delecour has a think (fake) French accent but I am not writing it that way because it gets far too frustating.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As the Lecter carriage travelled through the cobbled streets of London, Will discreetly watched the passing from behind the lace curtains. There were a few more people on the streets and many paused to watch the carriage rumble past, Lady LiFe's latest issue making them even more eager to see inside, the princess, her protector and the newcomer. A couple of men were gathered on the other side of the street whispering to one another when they arrived at the modiste and Mischa was assisted from the carriage by Hannibal who threw them a fierce look.

The bell above the door announced the arrival of the trio and Will had barely taken in the assortment of colours, ribbons and half-finished gowns before they were greeted by a petite dark woman with sparkling eyes. "Welcome," she said, her French accent was strong but the words clear. "It is good to see you again Count Lecter, Lady Mischa. Are you here for a debutante gown at last?" She asked with a spirited smile.

Misha pouted slightly when Hannibal answered. "Due to unforeseen circumstances my Misha will not be coming out this season but I do believe it is long overdue that her hemlines are dropped."

"I quite agree," the woman agreed, her eyes sliding to Will curiously.

"May I introduce Mister Will Graham. Will is Madam Genivieve Delecour, the most talented seamstress in all of London, in fact most of the continent."

"Count Lecter, you are too kind," she said with a flirtatious giggle, leading Misha to the dressing area.

“Notice how she does not correct me,” Hannibal said discreetly. Misha and the Geniveve were cooing over soft fabrics and trims, already ignoring the two men. “I have an appointment with Mister Stinson on Saville Row, I trust Misha will be safe in your capable hands,” Hannibal said, more clearly.

“But of course my lord,” she purred. “Do you wish for a change in the usual colour palette?” She asked.

“Now her hems are lowered, I imagine Misha can make her own choices,” Hannibal said, smiling indulgently when Misha turned a bright smile on him. “We shall be back later to settle up the bill.”

His hand was firm on Will’s back as they left the store, walking towards the nearby street. “You will find it is best to leave any shopping trip with a lady before you are dragged into offering opinions, there are entirely too many shades of fabric.”

“Is it different when buying clothes for yourself?” Will asked.

“No but a male tailor is less frustrated when you ask for blue,” Hannibal answered. “You will not be expected to know the difference between cerulean, azure and turquoise, simply point to the one you like best. I had to stay when Misha was younger and always left with a headache. Are there any particular colours or styles that appeal to you?” Hannibal asked.

“No idea,” Will answered. “I know nothing about fashion so I’m putting myself entirely in your hands,” Hannibal laughed softly at that and Will blushed. “More so this Mister Stinson’s hands,” he corrected.

“I warn you now it is not wise to encourage my jealousy,” Hannibal whispered, close to Will’s ear.

Will laughed but Hannial’s mouth stayed set in a firm line. “You are joking right?” Hannibal raised one thin eyebrow but stayed silent.

When they arrived at Mister Stinson’s establishment he was already waiting for them. “Good morning Count Lecter,” he said, his English was smart and crisp. “I was not expecting to see you again this year but I am always delighted to serve you,” he continued, brown eyes warm as they moved over Hannibal’s body. Will was surprised when he felt a flicker of jealousy at the familiarity, he told himself he was being silly, that he had no claim to Hannibal while unconsciously moving closer.

“I am quite content with my wardrobe for now, today I am shopping for a friend. This is Mister Will Graham, his godfather is a distant relative and he will be staying with me in London for a while,” Hannibal said smoothly, his hand resting on Will’s shoulder.

“A pleasure to meet you Mister Graham,” the tailor said, turning his attention to Will, his smile widening. “Casual or formal wear today?” He asked.

“Both,” Hannibal answered for him. “I will need the best you have to offer for Will’s first season in the city,” Hannibal said with a smile. “We have been invited to Lady Danbury’s

opening ball and you know her high standards,"

"Quite," the gentleman agreed. "We must not disappoint your fearsome hostess," he chuckled. He caught Will's hand and pulled him deeper into the store. "These clothes are wonderful quality," he commented, sliding Will's jacket from his shoulder. "Though rather out of fashion," he observed Will for a long moment. "I have some rather wonderful new styles that will suit you beautifully."

He withdrew reams of fabric in various shades as Hannibal settled on a couch, just behind Will, catching his eye in the mirror as Mister Stinson began naming a dozen colours Will had never heard of. He brought forward several samples up to Will's face, seeing how the shades looked next to his skin and hair. "Hannibal, do you have a preference?" He asked.

"You are the expert," he replied.

"Luckily for us all I haven't a single colour that does not suit your lovely ward," he answered honestly. He reached for a particularly thick fabric. "It may be too early in the year but this cobalt velvet would look exceptional with his eyes," he held out the reel to Hannibal. "See how structured it is, all the better to highlight a trim waist," he said, eyes flicking back to Will. "Mister Graham, here feel it," the soft fabric was pleasing against his hand and the colour striking. "Does it appeal?" He asked with a knowing smile.

Will hesitated, looking to Hannibal for guidance. Hannibal came to join them in front of the mirror and took the fabric from the tailor. He guided Will to face the mirror and held the fabric up to his body. "There is no wrong answer," he said softly. "I am happy to dress you up but you are not a doll and are entitled to your opinion. Do you like the feel, the colour?"

"Yes," Will answered. "Do you?" He asked.

"Very much. I did not think your eyes could look any more intense but I was quite wrong," Hannibal said, fingers dancing over Will's waist. "Mister Stinson, your taste is as good as ever. A waistcoat and jacket in this fabric would be wonderful."

"Could you be talked into a pearl lining and perhaps some ruffles?" Mister Stinson asked. "It may sound over the top but it is the current style to stand out, once properly fitted you will be stealing attention for even the most determined debutants."

"Will does not need embellishments to draw attention," Hannibal said fondly.

"I'm certain Lady LiFe would agree with you, she is quite intrigued," Mister Stinson agreed, hand moving furiously over a page, sketching out designs with notes of what fabric would work best before grabbing a measuring tape.

"Lady LiFe is intrigued by anything new and shiny," Hannibal scoffed. "Though for once I share her interest."

"I quite agree," the tailor said, taking Will's measurement with careful attention.

Will stood still and tall as fabric was draped over him and offered his opinion when asked. There were a few luxurious blacks and deep jewel tones but most were in blue and green. Hannibal seemed determined to give Will enough clothes for the rest of his life but Mister Stinson did not bat an eyelid, acting as though this reckless spending was commonplace, perhaps in the ton it was.

Once the many garments had been settled on, Hannibal moved towards the store front to examine some shoes, specifically riding boots, as Will was helped back into his clothes. He was getting used to having people insist on dressing him, something he had been doing from a very young age. Like Mathew the tailor took great pains smoothing out any lines with long fingers and tracing the patterns with his fingertips. Before adding Will's neck tie he stepped up behind him and dangled a silver pendant before Will's eyes, a glittering small key at the end and a dark red glass stone. "Do you like it?" Mister Stinson asked softly, whispering in Will's ear.

"Yes, it's lovely," Will answered, catching the tailor's twinkling eyes in the mirror. His voice was similarly low, automatically matching his behaviour.

"Good," the man purred, swiftly clasping the chain around his neck and slipping the pendant underneath his clothes. "A gift for a favourite client," he clarified, raising a finger to his lips as his eyes slid to where Hannibal lingered. "Our little secret," he grinned broadly.

"Please, Mister Stinson, it is not necessary," Will instead, taking a step back.

"Nonsnse, a necklace should to be worn only by one deserving of its beauty, I can think of no-one better," he brushed a long curl back from where it had fallen over Will's eyes and stayed holding it for a moment. "Call me Barnabus, I insist," he shot Will a quick wink before they returned to Hannibal.

They left the store with a few new neck scarves and two new pairs of shoes, including a fine pair of riding boots and a broach continuing blue and green stones that Will had admired. They were glass rather than true jewels but Hannibal had bought it for him anyway.

"Should you like some ice cream? I doubt Mischa will be done for another hour now she has free reign on styles and colours," Hannibal suggested, arm slung casually along Will's shoulder, bathing him in warmth. "There is a place nearby with a selection of wonderful flavours, I have a craving for dark cherry flavour."

"Yes please," Will answered eagerly. Hannibal would not be deterred from spending his money and Will was in no mood to argue even though everywhere they went he drew stares. Women glanced at him before looking down demurely if they caught him noticing before chancing another quick glance and returned to their conversation. Most men recognised Hannibal and nodded at him before examining Will with curiosity but none made a move to demand an introduction. Will was sure he caught the name Lady LiFe several times, it seemed most of society did not share Hannibal's low opinion of her.

He was quickly distracted away from the curious eyes when their food arrived. His own apricot flavoured ice cream was light and delicious but it was Hannibal that distracted him. The way he ate was most diverting. The iced desserts melted steadily and Will found it

maddening. As if Hannbal's lips closing around the spoon of deep purple was not seductive enough his tongue often darted out to catch a droplet had his mouth hanging open. Hannibal's every movement was heavy with seductive grace and at times Will believed it to be completely accidental, until Hannibal met his eyes and they flashed scarlet for a moment. When he smiled innocently Will returned the gesture and slowed down his own eating, licking his lips after each bite. After a few moments of this silent flirtation Hannibal leaned close with his voice low. "Are you attempting to inspire scandalous behaviour, Will?" He asked with a small smirk.

"I'm sure I have no idea what you are speaking of, Hannibal," Will replied.

"If only such a thing was true," Hannibal answered. "It may not be deliberate but you are a terrible influence, though no fault of your own," he added, mindful of their conversation in the water.

Will took his next bite as slowly as possible, fluttering his eyelashes as Hannibal as he swallowed before dragging his tongue along his lips with a pleased hum. The cool metal settled under his clothes swiftly leaving his mind.

With crystal bowls cleared they slowly made their way back to modiste. It was on the street Will made his first acquaintance. "Hannibal, how lovely it is to see you," an elegant lady in a deep red dress approached them. Hannibal moved his hand from Will's back to accept her extended hand and pressed a kiss to her glove. "I expected it to be a little while before I encountered any one of note," she said with a sharp smile. Her eyes landed on Will then. "Most are still in the country."

Will took in her appearance, she was a true beauty, porcelain skin and blond hair circling a strong face. Her eyes were piercing and crystal clear and held an air of intelligence but also coldness. "Good afternoon. Will, I would like to introduce you to Lady Bedelia DuMarier, a friend of mine," his hand returned to Will's back, encouraging him forward.

"It is a pleasure to meet you," he ventured, imitating Hannibal's manners and kissing her knuckles.

"I'm sure," she answered before turning her attention back to Hannibal. "I trust you will be attending Lady Danbury's opening ball?"

"I would not dare to miss it," Hannibal answered.

"Few would," she agreed. "Have you reconsidered my offer?" She asked.

"You are very kind to offer your sponsorship but Mischa's future is well handled and she will not be making her debut this season," he answered firmly.

She gave a soft laugh. "You cannot keep her trapped forever."

"I would not dream of it," Hannibal answered.

"Just until she is too old to find a suitable match," Bedelia suggested.

“I think there are a few more years before that becomes a concern,” Hannibal said.

“The decision is yours, even though I disagree,” Bedelia said.

“Mischa is my sister,” Hannibal stated with a mild bite to the woods. “I know what is best for her.”

“Of course,” Bedelia soothed. “Until the ball then, do save me a dance. Will,” she bowed her head slightly and swept away.

“There are entirely too many people with an opinion on Mischa’s future,” Hannibal muttered when she was out of earshot.

“Why should it matter to her?” Will asked. “I understand if a man were to ask or even Madame Delecour, I’ve seen debutante dresses and I don’t imagine they are cheap but why would another woman care?”

“There are reasons, although I fear I would seem unkind to bring them up,” he admitted.

“I won’t tell,” Will pushed.

“Curious?” Hannibal asked, eyes lightening.

“You did promise to teach me how society works,” Will responded. He was curious, the idea of being surrounded by crowds was intimidating enough but when they all seemed to share an understanding he did not it became downright frightening.

“Bedelia is a widow, as such she is likely to fade into the background when the spotlight lands on the young and beautiful and, especially, new rather than her,” Hannibal explained.

“I can’t imagine her fading,” Will answered honestly, recalling the woman’s elegance and quiet confidence.

“Sadly the ton has an incredibly short attention span,” Hannibal said. “While Bedelia had a sizable fortune and the means to live without a man, if she was hoping to take a second husband she would need to find her way into the spotlight. Debutants are presented by an already established woman, usually a relative. Mischa is without a mother or aunt to take that role.”

“Wouldn’t you present her?”

“I had hoped you would have noticed I am not a woman,” Hannibal said with a smirk. “No, it is not the done way I am afraid. There are a handful of widows or unfortunate ladies entering a fourth or even fifth season who would happily present Mischa in order to draw a little of her sparkle before the queen.

“So that’s what you think she wants?” Will asked. “Attention?”

“The Queen’s attention should not be underestimated,” Hannibal warned him. “I imagine that is what Bedelia wants though some women have less obvious motives,” he said with a slight

sneer.

“Such as?” Will pressed.

“As Mischa’s only living relative I will be focused on her until she is married and there are certain ambitious women who seem to believe that she is the only reason for my refusal to take a bride,” Hannibal said, irritation seeping into his tone. “They hope that I will be more open to advances once she is settled and no longer my responsibility, something that will never come to pass.”

“So who will present her?” Will asked.

“There are various options though I was hoping to enlist the service of Lady Danbury,” Hannibal answered.

“The one everyone is scared of?” Will asked.

“Well remembered Will,” Hannibal praised. “Yes she intimidates most but she has a fondness for Mischa and is a close friend of her majesty, plus she has no need to steal Mischa’s spotlight and has no designs on what is left of my virtue,” he added with a laugh. “There are a few mama’s who may be kind enough to take over the responsibility. Not Lady Featherington, she may mostly be an idiot but she would never encourage comparison between Mischa and her daughters.”

“You said you like Penelope,” Will pointed out.

“I do, but not one of her girls has hopes of comparing when standing next to Mischa,” Hannibal said with pride.

“You do not sound terribly nice right now,” Will chided mildly.

“I value honesty more than false niceties,” Hannibal answered honestly. “I hope you will not judge me too harshly,” he added more softly.

“I like honesty,” Will said.

Hannibal graced him with a warm smile and brushed the back of his finger with his own, Will wanted to grab his hand but while an arm around the shoulder when walking close by was not too much of an oddity, hand hosing was risky. Hannibal was bolder than Will and took his hand in his, squeezing briefly before releasing him just as they reached the modiste.

****

Mischa had a wonderful shopping trip, appreciative of the freedom she now had to choose her own fabrics and colours under the expert guidance of Madame Delecour.

“Lady Mischa, it is more important than ever that you look your best,” she insisted, measuring the length from the waist to the floor.

“Hardley,” Mischa said. “There will be no balls for me until the end of this season and that is only if I am most lucky.”

“But this is the year to set up a bevy of suitors for next season when you will be available to only the most special of gentlemen,” the older lady advised her. “With your hems dropped men will finally see you as the elegant young lady you are. You may not be able to have your brother take you to balls but there are opera performances, promenades, even the occasional picnic that includes younger guests. You will be seen and admired. Play this correctly and you will secure a record proposal,” she assured her with a smile.

“I am not sure I want a record proposal,” Misha admitted, straightening up to be properly measured. “Though perhaps meeting them early might help me to make the right choice,” she admitted.

“Ah, you are after a love match, oui?” She asked.

“I hope so,” Mischa answered, blushing lightly.

“Luckily you have two lovely men to protect you, ensuring only the best of men will make an advance,” Genevieve answered with a conspiratorial smile. “All you must do is look stunning. Now let us discuss colours, while blue and green so suit you very prettily I do have a couple of other options that will draw attention to your eyes. They do not realise it but every man notices luminous eyes and yours a such a rare and fascinating colour,” she praised.

“What colours would you recommend?” Mischa asked. The seamstress brought out a sample of a shimmering fabric caught between gold and bronze.

“A darker colour than many young ladies would choose but there is a faint rose base that keeps it from being too overwhelming,” she explained. “It will bring out your eyes but is several shades darker than your hair colour so you will avoid becoming a blur. Yes, this is an excellent colour for you and not one many a lady could pull off. No matter how much your brother stands out you will stand out more.”

“Hannibal has always commanded attention, even when we were children,” Mischa said. “But he is my favourite person in the world.”

“Family is everything, mademoselle.” she agreed. “Once Mister Stinson had worked his magic on your new friend the three of you will be a sensation to rival the Bridgetons themselves,” she gushed. “His waiting list is usually longer but Count Lecter is one of his favourites and I suspect by the end he will have taken a shine to Mister Graham too.”

“Will is quite lovely,” Mischa confirmed. “I haven’t met Mister Stinson but I’m sure he will like him too.”

“I have known Mister Stinson for many a year and believe me, this Will is just his type,” she said with a throaty chuckle.

“His type? I am not sure what you mean,” Mischa said. Madame Deleclour looked away, fussing with some ribbons. Her fine features made Mischa look more mature but if anything

she was even more naive than most young ladies her age, not even out yet, she had no idea of the secrets buried in the back of even the most finest establishments. “Madame Deleclour?”

“Mister Stinson is very devoted to his job and it is always exciting when he gets a new young fellow to dress up, especially if the young fellow is attractive. Surely you have noticed what a treat your brother’s friend is to the eyes?” Mischa nodded at that and blushed deeper. “He will have the time of his life dressing him up, I assure you,” she answered, placing a maternal hand on Misha’s shoulder. “Let me show you the new styles of shoes that have just arrived from Paris.”

Chapter End Notes

You will get to see the new clothes next chapter as well as what happened to the pewter knot and Mathew's reaction to Will's new jewellery. What else are you hoping to see, certain character or scenes.

Kinktober is now over for the year and already some have been asking for follow-ups. Do I ever say no? But I will need your assistance to a follow up to part 2, the omegaverse. Who do want Hannibal to duel for fair Will's hand in marriage, Fredrick, Jack, Francis or someone else? Right now I'm watching x-men origins and Sabertooth is giving some alpha vibes.

As always, kudos and comment bring me joy while constructive criticism and requests are always gratefully received.

Until next time dearest gentle readers, survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rude.

XXX

End Notes

I'd love some honest feedback and it'd be great if you could let me know what your favorite tropes are.

My original work is available on kindle under the pen names Lishiva Dee and Eliza Elgy.

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Survive, live and thrive and, whenever possible, eat the rude.

XXX

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!